S.BARING-GOULD







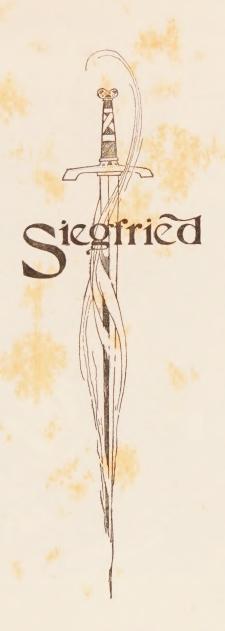


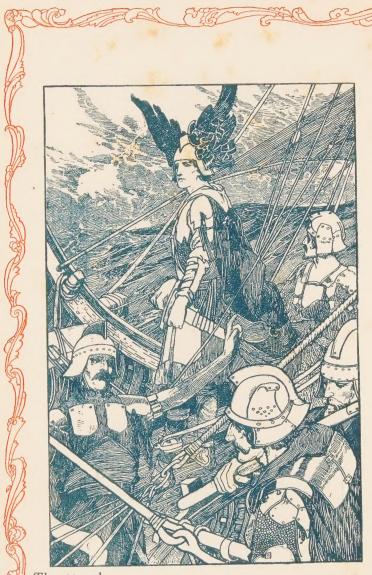


SIEGFRIED
IS THE SECOND
OF A SERIES
OF ROMANCES
FOUNDED ON THE
THEMES OF THE
GRAND OPERAS
OF WHICH
THE VALKYRIES
BY E. F. BENSON
IS THE FIRST









The approach of Siegmund.



A ROMANCE

FOUNDED ON WAGNER'S OPERAS, "RHEINGOLD,"
"SIEGFRIED" AND "GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG"

BY

S. BARING-GOULD



ILLUSTRATED BY

CHARLES ROBINSON

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INTRODUCTION



HE story of Siegfried is perhaps the most ancient of all the heroic tales of our Teutonic and Scandinavian forefathers.

It is one of unparalleled grandeur and tragedy.

The earliest form in which it comes to us is in the lays that are given in the *Elder Edda*. This was attributed, whether

rightly or wrongly, by Bishop Brynjolf Svendsen, who first published it from a MS., to Seemund the Wise, an Icelandic priest, who died in 1133. Sæmund, or whoever made the collection, merely gathered together the old heathen lays of the Norse race, both mythological and heroic; and there was nothing of his own in it. The Bishop published Semund's *Edda* in 1643. The first part of this Edda contains mythological poems, the meaning of which was fast being lost when they were collected. They relate to the origin of the world, the pagan gods, and the end of all things which they all had to look to. The second part consists of heroic lays, and of these nine belong to Siegfried, or, as he is called in the Norse, Sigurd. But others relate to his ancestry. Some of these lays were fragmentary, and all contain allusions which probably even in Sæmund's time were ceasing to be wholly intelligible.

But the entire story of Siegfried, or rather Sigurd, Fafner's slayer, is given in the wonderful Icelandic *Volsunga Saga*, the date of which it is impossible to fix. It breathes the rankest and most ferocious paganism. There is not a trace in it of mediæval chivalry or of Christian feeling. It must belong to a time before the Gospel had made the slightest impression on the Norse people.

But the story was known also to the Germans. Unhappily we have no very early German version, but we have it in two late forms: one is that of the *Niebelungen Lied*, which was a re-edition of an earlier epic, the *Nibelunge Nôt*, and was composed in the twelfth century.

Nothing can be greater than the contrast in tone between the story as told in the *Niebelungen Lied* and as related in the *Volsunga Saga*. The story is the same, but it has lost its ferocity, and has assumed a chivalrous and a Christian complexion.

Another German variant was translated into Icelandic, under the title of the Vilkina Saga, which relates the deeds of King Thidrek (Theodoric) of Bern (Verona), but which contains also the story of Siegfried. It is probable that the same piece was known to the Anglo-Saxons, under the name of Beowulf; we have the old heroic Beowulf lay that dates from the eighth century, and L. E. H. Müller has noted that he is almost identical with Sigurd or Siegfried. "He stands," says he, "identical with the Sigurd of the Edda, only in the latter his fight with

the dragon and his winning of Brunnhilde are specially accentuated, and his other achievements are lightly passed over." ¹

When Wagner adopted the story of Siegfried as his theme for a great trilogy with a "Vorspiel," it was open to him to take either the Norse, purely pagan tale, or the German, which was a softened and Christian version. He chose the former. But he did not take it in its entirety. He was greatly struck by the weirdness of Norse mythology as revealed in the first part of the *Edda* of Sæmund. This was intensified by his study of the *Younger Edda*. The latter was a composition by Snorro Sturlason (1178–1241). Snorro

¹ Beowulf, ed. Lud. E. H. Müller, Zürich, 1840, p. 17. In this ancient poem, a thane is mentioned, whose memory is stored with old Sagas, and he tells of Sigemund "the Wælsing," his fights and his slaying of the dragon; Sigemund is substituted for Sigefried.

found that with the adoption of Christianity in Iceland, the old mythology was becoming forgotten, and as the ancient poetry of the Norse was crowded with allusions to this mythology, the inevitable result would be that the old poems would become totally unintelligible and be cast aside. To rescue them from such a fate Snorro wrote a prose account of the myths of the gods and the cosmogony believed in by the Norse before they became Christian. And this book of his goes by the name of the *Younger Edda*.

There is something vastly fascinating in the savage grandeur of this old Northern religion; its stories are grim and wild to the last degree; and when Wagner had become acquainted with it, he felt that he had got matter in his hands to which he could set music entirely expressive of its grandeur and inhuman character; but then, he was bitten as well by the Siegfried legend; and he sought to combine both.

Now in the original story of Sigurd, the gods of Walhalla scarce make themselves felt at all. Wotan or Odin shows only on one occasion, and that in an episode which has not been used by Wagner. There are, however, two very brief allusions to him, one connected with the robbery of the Niebelungen treasure, and the other with regard to the sleep of Brunnhilde. She, on waking, explains that she had been sent to sleep because she had offended Odin.

In the *Niebelungen Lied*, of course, Wotan is not mentioned at all, and the fire circle and the long sleep drop away.

But Wagner was resolved on weaving

the mythologic theme into that of the heroic epic. Whether he has been successful in so doing, or whether he has not confused the whole story, is a matter of opinion.

To accommodate the story of Sigurd to his purpose he had to take great liberties with the original. Sigurd was not the son of Siegmund and Sieglinde, but their grandson. It was surely not necessary to drag in the peculiarly offensive story of incest, when it did not belong to the tale of Sigurd himself.

Then, in the original story, whether Norse or German, the ring does not figure prominently. Sigurd does indeed give to Brynhildr (Brunnhilde) a gold ring, and by this ring she afterwards discovers the fraud that has been perpetrated on her; but the ring is not one

of mythological importance. The fate of Walhalla does not depend on it, and in the trilogy it comes in rather clumsily, like the magic flute in the *Zauberflöte*, and one cares very little about it.

It may be questioned whether Wagner did well in bringing on the stage the scene of the fight with the dragon. The composer of the Niebelungen Lied with fine tact cast the history of Fafner into the background, and put it into the mouth of Hagen, who tells it in six lines to Gunther. But when the fight with the dragon is brought upon the stage and drawn out into an entire scene-a thing tolerable in a Christmas pantomime only we may well say with the Spectator: "How would the Wits of King Charles's Time have laughed—what a Field of Railery would they have been let into, had they been entertained with painted Dragons spitting Wild-fire, enchanted Chariots drawn by Flanders mares, and real Cascades in artificial Land-skips!"

Wagner was induced to fuse, or attempt to fuse together, the mythology of the *Edda* with the heroic story of Siegfried, because he desired to make of the Ring of the Niebelungen a metaphysical lesson. But who cares for the metaphysics? We would rather have a story set before us that is clearly intelligible, and that the Ring is not. It may be questioned whether any one who goes through the series comes away with a very clear understanding as to what it is all about.

Now in the drama, Wagner has made some slips through his meddling with the story. For instance, he gives us no

reason why Siegfried was alone among men able to pass through the fire unhurt. He makes Brunnhilde render him invulnerable save in his back after he has traversed the flames. But according to the early tale, he was able to go through the fire because he had bathed in the dragon's blood. That had made him so that neither flame nor steel could scorch or wound him. I have ventured to restore this in the following version of the tale; it in no way interferes with the movement of the drama. Perhaps Wagner thought he could not make his hero strip and bathe in public. But, then, why bring the dragon on the stage at all?

I have also accentuated certain points in the tale so as to render it more intelligible and more coherent.

I have not followed literally the dia-

logue or translated the rhythmic pieces songs one cannot call them. What I have essayed to do is to tell the story in such a manner that it can be grasped as a story; and the story of Siegfried really begins, as represented by Wagner, with the Rheingold. The Valkyrie is an episode loosely attached to it. In the Norse Sigrdrîfumâl, in the Elder Edda, and in the Volsunga Saga it is touched on very slightly in just these words. "Brynhild said: Two kings fought, one was called Hialmgunnar; he was old and a great warrior, and Odin had promised him victory. The other was Agnar, whom no divinity would patronize. Sigrdrifa (Brynhild) overcame Hialmgunnar in battle; in revenge Odin pricked her with a sleep-thorn, and declared that henceforth she should never

have victory in battle, and should be given in marriage. But I said to him that I had bound myself by a vow not to espouse any man who could be made to fear."

Out of these few words the second and third acts of the Valkyrie are spun. And it was quite possible to tell the story of Siegfried with only an allusion to the reason why Brunnhilde was sent to sleep.

Then, in the scene of Wotan and Alberich, to help the god to get the mastery over the dwarf, Wagner has had recourse to an expedient taken from *Puss in Boots*.



SIEGFRIED

CHAPTER I

IN THE RHINE-DEEPS



N the far-off ages, before history began, ere man had spread widely over the earth, when all is vested in mist, and forms are seen gigantic and strange, when the gods of Walhalla

stalked over the land and had not retreated or disappeared before the civilization of man;—then a green mantle as of velvet pile was cast over the face of the earth on

both sides of the Rhine, fringed to the south by the gleaming glaciers of the Alps, and stretching north in one unbroken extent to the Baltic and the German Ocean. Where the Rhine issued from the sheet of what we call now the Lake of Constance, but which then had no name, the whole territory was unpeopled. Not a fume of blue smoke rose anywhere from a human hearth; only in one spot and that above the Rhine was to be seen a cloud as of smoke, but which was not smoke at all but the spray of the mighty river as it leaped over a barrier and roared down into a gulf profound.

The angry waters seethed and swirled below, throwing up spouts of foam, reeling in green billows, eddying into dark whirlpools.

In the depths of that vast cauldron swam and sported three Rhine-nixes, water-maids who guarded the treasures of the Rhine-gold stored behind the plunging falls. Occasionally they rose to the surface, but never in the sunlight, only when the full moon shone, for their delicate white skin was blistered by the solar blaze. But beneath the crystal green water they glanced as living flashes of lightning in the sunlight that passed through the medium of the translucent flood. When the moon shone bright, and turned the foam of the torrent to silver, they would rise and disport them on the surface, swim against the current, wreath their arms, and swing around as in dance in the swirl of the river.

Then from out of the forest came the Wood-spirits and sang to them, and cast

to them wreaths of flowers gathered on earth, chainlets of forget-me-not, and branches of lily-of-the-valley, and the Water-spirits would swim after these and don the garlands, for no flowers ever opened in the depths of the Rhine. And in return they would catch the glittering salmon and cast it ashore for the Woodnixes.

Then, hand-in-hand, they would revolve in dance and sing the strange song of the Rhine, and the Spirits of the Wood would also beat the turf in dance by the river-side, and sing the Lay of the Forest. From afar, gleaming in the pure light, looked down the everlasting Alps, clothed in silver, those mighty Alps that fed the river with its waters, and that would stand for ever, and see all the changes the world would pass through,

would see the forest felled and its place occupied by villages and pasture-land and fields of corn; and the river tamed to turn mills, and work factories and bear steamboats on its heaving bosom; would see the Wood-spirits vanish from off the face of the earth, and the Water-spirits retreat to the lowest profound of the Rhine, never to rise again, but sit and mourn and weep that the end of the old order had arrived never again to be restored.

Now, as the Water-nixes danced on the waves in the broad moonlight, they were never wholly oblivious of the obligation laid on them, to guard the treasure of the Rhine-gold; but ever and anon, one would disengage her hands from those of her sisters, and dive and look to see that all was secure beneath the falls.

And it was so, that occasionally, from

out of the rocks peered the dwarfs, the Spirits of Earth, hideous beings, whose dwelling was in caves and chasms of the mountains. And when these were seen, then a fear fell on the Spirits of the Wood and the Spirits of the Water. The former guessed, but did not know, that the time would come when the trees would be felled to smelt the ore in the veins of the mountains, over which the dwarfs kept guard. But the Spirits of the Rhine knew full well that these earth-kobbolds envied them the gold treasured in the depths of the Rhine cauldron, lusted after it, and would never rest till they had robbed them of it.

Thus it fell out, that in the midst of their sports, should a dwarf appear, the merrymakers scattered; the Wood-nixes fled to the forest recesses, and the River-nixes dived to guard the Rhine-gold. The dwarfs had their home, as already said, in the mountains. Their central realm was called Nibelheim, the home of darkness, and their occupation is tracing out the arteries of metal that run through the rock forming the body of earth. They search for bunches of precious ore which they collect in Nibelheim, as a great central treasure.

Long had they known of the store of gold under the Rhine-Falls, but which they could not reach and capture, because of the strict guard kept over it by the Waternixes. But to obtain it they were resolved.

There was but one of them who thought he saw the way to do this. An earthquake had shaken the world and rent the mountains, and had rolled vast masses of rock into the valleys; and it had split the bed of the Rhine, so that the water poured into it, till it had brimmed it, before it could flow on in its wonted course.

Now the cunning elf, Alberich, saw that his chance had come, he and the other dwarfs dug with their picks and hammers a passage in the bowels of the earth till they reached the bottom of this rift; and through the opening thus made, Alberich thrust himself and scrambled up the chasm, working with hands and knees, till he had reached the cauldron into which the mighty Rhine pours in its When he emerged out of the darkness below into the green light, where the sun shone through the water, he was at first dazzled and bewildered. He crouched among the rocks and looked about him. Then, after his eyes had become accustomed to the light, he saw the Water-



Alberich in the Rhine-deeps.



nixes, the Daughters of the Rhine, at their play.

Never before had he seen them so clearly, with their glistening skin, their graceful undulations, their flowing hair. and their beautiful faces. If he had peered at them from the rocks when they gamboled on the surface at night, he had at once been detected, and they had dived out of sight. Besides, the distance had been great, and the light uncertain. Now the sisters were wholly unconscious of his presence, and unsuspicious of danger from below. He watched them with growing emotions of admiration and passion, and forgot the object for which he had crept into their realm.

Presently he disengaged himself from the cleft, and advancing, called to the Water-nixes, in terms of flattery, and attempted to cajole them to a near approach.

At first they were alarmed, but soon fear gave way to amusement at the hideous appearance of the elf, and at his amorous advances.

"Oh, you lovely creatures, Daughters of the Deep Waters," said he. "Never have I seen in the bosom of the earth, in the Nibelheim below, beings so fair, so graceful, so alluring. Suffer me to join you in your sports."

The Water-nixes now began to trifle with him, to coquet with him, one after the other, to draw him on, and then repulse him; he became more and more in earnest in his pursuit. If he could but win one and carry her off with him to the dark world below, it would be worth all the store of gold hidden under the Rhine-Falls.

But the Undines or Water-nixes had not the smallest inclination to be captured and carried out of the green glory of the Rhine-deeps into the nether world of darkness. They were frolicsome beings, and it afforded them great sport to torment the kobbold, to approach him, till he threw out his arms to clasp them, and then to glide away, rise in the water and elude his embrace. At length he could endure their tricks and mockery no longer, and from a tone of tenderness and entreaty he fell into one of rage and disappointment, and crouching on a rock, exhausted with his efforts, he shook his fist at them and vowed revenge.

Just then, the sun, which had been behind a cloud, shot down a ray upon the Rhinegold where it rested, and Alberich saw it.

At once his thoughts of love fled, overmastered by greed for the treasure. The Daughters of the Rhine saw how enthralled he was, and still seeking to torment him, they cried: "Know, Alberich, you hideous dwarf, that he who obtains this store, and fashions out of it a ring, will obtain mastery over the whole world!" And another said: "Oh, love-smitten elf, know that none can win the store but he who has utterly forsworn love!"

"That have I!" roared the dwarf; "away with all thoughts of love. I ask none of it. My only mistress shall be gold; my only ambition to win it and make the ring; then shall I be lord of all, and also of you false water-witches!"

Springing from his place he rushed to the treasure, gathered it up, and whilst the Rhine maidens fled in terror, made off with it, and scrambled down the cleft, to the world underground.

CHAPTER II

THE BUILDING OF WALHALLA

At the same time that the wood and water nymphs disported in forest and river, and the dwarfs burrowed in the rocks, the gods walked the earth, and the giants dwelt in Jötunheim in the icy north.

The chief of the gods was Wotan, who was blind of one eye, and who wandered over the earth wrapped in a long mantle, and with a slouched hat on his head, which he drew down to hide the loss of his eye.

The whole world, be it known, is sus-

tained by one mighty tree, named Ygg-drasil, that shoots up into the heavens, and is heavy with golden apples, and these apples are the stars. Now and then when an apple is over-ripe it falls. Now and then a mighty wind shakes the boughs, and then many are seen to shoot to earth.

The roots of this tree lie far below the earth in Hell, where they are gnawed by serpents, and when they have eaten them away, then the tree Yggdrasil will fall over, and heaven and earth will rush into chaos. Out of a branch of this Worldtree, Wotan had fashioned a spear, and on the duration of this lance his power rested. When the staff should be cut asunder or broken, then would his power as a god come to an end.

Moreover Wotan rides over the world

on his horse called Sleipnir, and his black hounds go with him. He is hunting after human souls, and at night you may hear the yelping of these hounds as Wotan and they sweep over the earth. If any one hear the barking of the dogs, he must cast himself with his face to the ground, and not look up whilst the Wild Hunt goes by.

Before Wotan flies an owl with flery eyes, it is called the Tutoesel.

Wotan goes by many names. One by which he is known is Haekelberend, the mantle-bearer, because of his flapping cloak.

Wotan also possessed a remarkable ship, with a dragon head, all covered with gold. It was so large that all the gods with their weapons and war stores could find room within. When the great white sails were

set, a favourable breeze arose and wafted her to her place of destination. But she does not float in the sea, but in the air, and ofttimes when we see a great cloud sail by, it is the ship of Wotan with the gods on board. The ship was contrived with so great skill that it could be taken to pieces when not required and folded together like a handkerchief, and then Freia put it into her pocket.

Wotan had two ravens who sat on his shoulder when he was at home, drinking with the gods. Every morning they spread their wings and flew round the world and picked up tidings of what went on there. Then, at night, they returned and perched on his shoulders, and whispered into his ears what they had learned.

He had also two tame wolves; and whatever meat was set before him he

cast to the wolves, for he needed no food, all he took was mead, the drink of the gods, and this mead is made from the milk of a she-goat that browses on the leaves of the World Tree of which the staff of Wotan's spear was made. On the shaft of that spear were engraved runes, magic lines that imparted to him marvellous powers; yet all his powers were limited, and could not last for ever; when the lance should be cleft in twain, they would fail.

Wotan had a wife, Fricka, and he and she are the parents of the gods, the Æsir from whom are descended both the Norsemen, the Danes and the Germans. Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors claimed descent through their kings from Wotan, who has given this name to the fourth day of the week.

His sister was Freia, the goddess of beauty and love.

Other gods were Donnar, who had a red beard, and walked the world with a huge hammer in his hand, which he hurled, and smote in sunder a tree when it was struck, and shivered the rocks on which it fell. Another was Froh, who, so says the fable, was so much in love with a damsel, that he gave away his sword to win her, and thenceforth used a stag's antler as his weapon. He was the brother of Freia.

Another god was Loge, a mischievous, wicked, and crafty being whose counsel, if shrewdly given to gain an immediate end, led finally to evil consequences. "He," says the old Norse *Edda*, "is handsome and well made, but of a very fickle mood, and most evil disposition. He surpasses all beings in those arts called Cunning and

Perfidy. Many a time has he exposed the gods to very great perils, and often extricated them again by his artifices."

The highest points of the earth are the sunny peaks on which Wotan desired to make his habitation. But neither he nor any other of the gods was anything of a builder, and so he sent Donnar into the regions of Frost, where dwelt the giants, to bid some of them come to him and erect for him a palace more glorious than any that can be conceived. Donnar succeeded in inducing two master-builders to come, and these were Fasolt and Fafner. They, however, refused to lay the foundations even unless they were promised the goddess Freia to take back with them into the icy North, where love and beauty are not much to be found. Wotan was very reluctant to yield to this demand, but he

wanted his palace, and he reckoned on the cunning of Loge to over-reach the giants when the day of settlement arrived.

Relying on the promise made by Wotan, the giants set to work, and in time completed the palace of glittering white marble walls and golden roofs. This is the famous Walhalla, the home of the gods, and to which are summoned all such as die bloody deaths on the field of battle, and their souls are conducted to it by the Valkyries, the warrior maidens sent forth by Wotan, who is their father, to hover over fields of carnage.

When the palace was complete, great unrest filled the minds of the gods and goddesses at the prospect of losing Freia, and Fricka rebuked Wotan for his rashness in making such a promise as he had to the two giants. But above all, fear fell on Freia herself. The horror of being carried away from lands where the sun shone warm, and the flowers bloom, and the bee hums, to the region where reigns eternal frost, where night broods for many months, where the only vegetation is grey moss, and where roam the white foxes and the reindeer, was a terror to her. Moreover, she little relished becoming the wife of one or other of the hideous giants, and of never seeing again the faces of the gods her kinsfolk.

She entreated Fricka to aid her out of her difficulties. Wotan's only hope was that Loge would be so subtle as to find a flaw in the agreement. Then Freia cried to the other gods—

"Oh, my brethren! come to my aid! Help me, Donnar! Help me, Froh!"

And now the last stone was laid, the

last golden tile placed on the roof of Walhalla, and Fasolt and Fasner came to demand their pay.

"See," said one of the giants, "the work has been well executed. You may pass your nail over the joints of the stone, and not find where they are. Towers and hall, all are complete, and glorious in their finish."

"That is well done," said Wotan; "now you may depart to the Land of Frost."

"We go not without our wage; Freia the Beautiful has been promised to us. Without Freia we do not return."

"Freia is my sister," replied Wotan; "from her I cannot part."

"What!" roared Fasolt. "You deny the compact, and would break troth with us!"

"You a god and perjured!" shouted Fafner.

"Pshaw!" said Wotan. "I was but joking. You can't expect a goddess to accompany monstrous louts such as you. Fools are ye for holding me to be so false a brother as to make over my sister to you. Come, accept something else in her place."

"We will have nothing else."

"But she it is who plucks the golden apples off the Yggdrasil, on which we live, of which eating we maintain our vouth."

"Wither then, ye gods, for lack of them. Freia is ours." The giants seized on Freia to bear her away.

Donnar now interfered and threatened to hurl his hammer at the giants, but Wotan interfered. That would be infamy were he, a god, to reward the giants for having built Walhalla, by compassing their death. Then Loge arrived; he had been sent by Wotan through the world in quest of some prize that might be accepted by the mighty builders in lieu of Freia. He had sought everywhere, in earth, in sea, in heaven, nothing was there that could equal the worth and love of Freia. But he had an idea. He had heard the wailing of the Daughters of the Rhine, as they lamented the loss of the Rhine-gold, that had been stolen from them by the elf, Alberich. How would it be, if they were to secure this store of gold, and pay it to the giants in lieu of Freia?

When they heard this the fire of avarice kindled in the hearts of Fasolt and Fafner, and they consented to take the gold in exchange for Freia, if the gods could procure it; but until it had been obtained, they insisted that Freia should remain in their custody. To this Wotan reluctantly consented, and the giants removed her.

No sooner was she gone, than the gods felt her loss. Love and beauty had been withdrawn from their realm. The joy of existence was gone. Moreover, none of them save Freia could pluck the golden apples from the boughs of Yggdrasil, and without this fruit old age with pallor and feebleness fell on the gods. Even Fricka became haggard, and Donnar felt the strength of his arm gone.

Then Wotan signed to Loge to lead him on; they two would descend into the bowels of the earth, and there wrest from the dwarfs the gold that they had stolen from the Daughters of the Rhine. Moreover, as Wotan well knew, if he could obtain the ring that had been fashioned out of it by Alberich, he would obtain dominion over the whole world.

By means of a rift, through which sulphurous fumes issued, the gods Wotan and Loge descended to the nether world.

CHAPTER III

IN THE UNDER-WORLD

Now Wotan and Loge passed down the rift in the rocks that led towards the nether world, Nibelheim, where dwelt his dwarfs. This rift had been made by an earthquake, and out of it came blasts of fire and smoke in which danced lambent blue flames. But the two gods heeded that not, they scrambled from one prong of rock to another; here and there slimy water oozed out of the stones, and made descent difficult as well as dangerous. Nevertheless they proceeded on their descent. Ever and anon they heard sounds from below, howls of rage and

bursts of laughter, and then the roaring of fire driven by blasts of wind from bellows. And this was the cause of these sounds.

Alberich had brought the gold of the Rhine into Nibelheim, and out of some of it he had fashioned for himself the ring that gave all power over men and elves, and by its virtue he had assumed authority as a king over all the dwarfs.

Wearied with his labours, and deeming it derogatory to his position as king to continue working, he had compelled his brother Mime to labour at his forge, and had forced him to fashion a magic helm or bassinet, the tarnhelm or tarnkappe (Hood of Darkness), that possessed the virtue of rendering him who wore it invisible at will, or enabled him to assume any form he desired.

No sooner was the tarnkappe complete



Wotan and Loge descending into the Under-world.



than Alberich snatched it from his brother, who was too dull to understand the virtues of that which he had been condemned to make, and assuming it he became invisible and rained cruel blows on the back of his wretched brother. It was the cries and howls of Mime that the descending gods had heard, as they had also the mocking laughter of Alberich. "Ah, fool! fool!" scoffed Alberich, "Wit in the world above and below uses brute force to its own ends, and thereupon treads on and thrashes brute force that it has converted into its slave."

Then Alberich abandoned Mime, whom he left sprawling and moaning on the ground, and retreated to distant halls of Nibelheim to establish the rule of Fear over all the other dwarfs of the underground world. Hardly had he departed before the gods Wotan and Loge entered the forge of the elves below, and saw Mime writhing from the blows he had received. They bent over him, and at first he shrank away, fearing fresh indignities showered upon him, but Loge bade him be of good cheer and rise, for he and Wotan had entered Nibelheim, not to add to his sufferings but to redress them.

"But tell us what has befallen you?"

"I—I am Mime, the brother of Alberich. By some means, to me unknown, he has become possessed of a ring that gives him sovereign power over us kobbolds of the heart of the earth. He lords it over us by the power of the ring. We cannot resist him, and he tyrannizes over us, he who was once but as were the rest of us. We were happy, we and our

wives, living as we listed in the mountains, and we picked out treasures for ourselves from the veins of ore, wherewith to make bracelets and rings and necklets for our wives. But now, all is changed. Alberich, my brother, has wrested all our treasures from us, and hordes it for himself. He treats us, his former equals, as his slaves, he keeps us hard at work, drudging in mines to find gold for him. And me, his brother, whom he might have considered and loved, me he uses worst of all, because I am a skilful smith. He forces me to be ever working at the anvil, fabricating this and that at his good-will, and never gives me a word of praise or even thanks for all my toil and skill. Recently he has forced me to make a Cap of Darkness for him. He laid down the rules, he spoke

the magic words, he sprinkled it with witch waters, and little did I understand the virtues of what I was fashioning. And then when it was completed, he snatched it from me, and because I remonstrated and upbraided him, and vowed I would work no longer for him, he put on him the tarnkappe and became all at once invisible, and thus beat me and bound me, and cast me bruised and lamed on the ground. Who are ye that come hither to this hateful abode? If ye have power to release me from this bondage to my brother, ye are indeed welcome, for he is no brother to me, now that he has the ring of power, but is an exacting and insatiable taskmaster."

"But," said Loge, "why do you not revolt against his despotism?"

"How can we? he has power over us

through the virtue of the ring. We are helpless before him. Only the gods of Walhalla can aid us."

"And we are here," said Wotan.

At that moment cries were heard, and in poured the miserable dwarfs, enserfed by Alberich, with him behind them, lashing them, to drive them to their work, for he allowed them no ease, so greedy was he to augment his store.

Loge and Wotan folded their cloaks about them, and the latter drew down his slouched hat over his eyes that his face might not be seen, and he be recognized by his having but a single eyeball.

"One to the bellows! one to the anvil! The rest with pick and shovel to the veins of ore," shouted Alberich; "no rest, no relaxation, work, work, work for you all!—But," he saw the strangers,

"whom have we here? Who are these who have ventured into the abode of darkness, into the world of the elves?"

The miserable dwarfs crowded round in curiosity to see strangers in Nibelheim.

"What!" yelled Alberich, "are ye taking occasion of this to lag from your work? By the power of the ring I control you all. Go—one to the bellows, one to the anvil, the rest with pick and shovel to gather the gold for me—for me—for me only!"

And he drove them forth.

Then turning to the gods he again asked—

"But who are ye?"

Then said Wotan without discovering himself—

"Sir, we have heard great report of thy power. The tidings of the majesty of the King of Nibelheim has reached the upper world; and we have received such wondrous reports of the wisdom and power of Alberich, that we have ventured down into the nether world to assure ourselves whether what is told above be true, so that we may either declare that men lie when they say that Alberich is all-wise and all-powerful; or that we may assure them that what is said is but a half of what we have seen."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Alberich. "By the power of the ring I am all-mighty and all-wise."

"Why," said Loge, "it is even whispered that Alberich is mightier than the gods of Walhalla."

"Than the gods of Walhalla!" mocked the dwarf. "What are they but fools beside me!" "But they are powerful," said Wotan, "none more powerful."

"Powerful, are they!" scoffed the dwarf. "Their power is but feebleness to mine."

"They have constrained the giants to build them a palace, the like of which no man has ever seen."

"I can build one more resplendent with gold and set with precious stones. I command all the treasures of the earth."

"It is said," remarked Loge craftily, "that Wotan once transformed himself into an eagle that he might drink of the water of the Well of Wisdom."

"I know the story," laughed Alberich, "and how the guardian of the Well also pursued him in eagle form as well, and Wotan fled as fast as his wings could carry him, and spluttered and spewed out the

sacred draught, and the drops fell to earth, and what wisdom and the gift of poesy men possess is from what Wotan cast from him in his headlong flight before the guardian of the Well of Wisdom."

"The story had best be forgotten," said Loge, but he laughed maliciously, for he saw that Wotan was ashamed, and drew his slouched hat lower over his face. "The story, however, is true. But it was a great achievement, that of transformation into a bird. That is beyond the powers or skill of Alberich, I doubt not."

"Is it?" asked the dwarf. "See what I can do."

Thereupon he drew on the tarnkappe and at once assumed the shape of a serpent.

After hissing and rearing himself, and threatening the guests, he resumed his former shape, and laughingly asked, "What think ye of that?"

"This is a wonderful feat indeed," said Loge. "But I do not hold it so great an achievement for one to make himself of larger size than he was before as it would be to reduce himself to smaller dimensions. That is what Alberich can never do."

"Can I not?—you shall see!" exclaimed the dwarf, and instantly he transformed himself into a toad.

"Quick!" shouted Loge to Wotan; "set your foot on him."

In an instant Wotan had the toad under his heel, and Loge stooping tore off it the tarnkappe. Immediately Alberich recovered his former shape, and lay writhing and powerless beneath the foot of the god.

"Hold him fast," said Loge. "Do not let him go, and I will bind him securely."

Kneeling, Loge tied the dwarf hand and foot. It was in vain that he tossed and writhed, and bit and kicked. He had been mastered, and was in the power of the gods.

"Now," said Loge, "let us mount to the upper world with our captive. Now we shall be able to redeem Freia."

CHAPTER IV

THE CURSE OF THE RING

From the nether world, the realm of Nibelheim, Wotan and Loge ascended by the shaft torn by the earthquake, and by which they had clambered down, till they reached the upper world, dragging Alberich with them, who made desperate but fruitless efforts to escape. He was too fast bound to get free, for Loge had provided himself with a cord twisted out of six threads, and these threads were, the noise made by the footfall of a cat, the beards of women, the roots of stones, the sinews of bears, the breath of fish, and the

spittle of birds. This was the bond fashioned by the gods for the binding of Fenrir, the wolt who was destined to devour the sun and the moon and the world, could he break it. And if this sixfold cord could bind Fenrir, it would avail for Alberich. Therefore, with great forethought, Loge had provided himself with it before descending into Nibelheim.

So, after much labour, the two gods brought Alberich the dwarf into the upper world, and cast him down where he could look on Walhalla, the new palace built for the gods by the giants.

"Now," said Wotan, "here you lie, you despicable dwarf, bound with a bond thou canst not break till thou obtainest thy liberty by redeeming it at such a price as we shall fix."

"Woe to thee, thou treacherous and

dissembling god," cried the enraged dwarf. "Thou hast me in bondage, but my tongue is free, and with that I can curse thee."

"Curse if thou wilt," said Loge, "but we can torture thee."

"I shall revenge myself," said Alberich.

"Thou hast no power to do that when thou art in bondage," replied Wotan.

"How then may I obtain my release?" asked Alberich.

"You must surrender the treasure of the Rhine-gold," answered Wotan.

"The Rhine-gold!" mocked the dwarf.

"Are ye immortals greedy after the yellow ore as are mortals?" Then chuckling to himself, he added: "Gold! gold! I can always gather more. The veins of earth are not exhausted. So long as I have the ring I retain my power over the gnomes."

"Well, now," said Wotan, "will you surrender the store?"

"Loose my right hand," replied Alberich, "and I will summon my slaves to me, and they shall bring up all the hidden treasure."

Wotan signed to Loge, who thereupon released the right arm of their captive; and Alberich, by virtue of the ring, called up the dwarfs of the nether world to produce and pile up the treasure that he had accumulated below.

"There," said Alberich, "I have paid my ransom; restore me the tarnkappe and let me go."

"No, indeed," retorted Loge. "The Helm of Darkness goes with the rest. I wrenched it from you, and ours it remains. I have no intent to leave it with you that therewith you may work more mischief."

"What rogues and thieves these gods be!" screamed the infuriated and baffled gnome. "I did know that such rascality and greed were the portion of man on the face of the earth. Whence have they learnt it? Not from us who live in the under-world, but from you Æsir, to whom they look for guidance, whom they worship, and to whom do sacrifice. Well will it be for mankind if the spear of Wotan snap in his hand, and all the realm of the gods comes to naught, and the old order be changed."

"Shall I set him free?" asked Loge.

"Not yet," replied Wotan; "he still bears on his finger the Ring of Power fashioned out of the Rhine-gold."

"The ring!" yelled the dwarf. "That is mine."

"It belongs to the hoard. I must have it also."

"Take from me my life, but leave me the ring," whimpered the gnome.

"Your life is worthless. Possess that if you will. I need it not, but the ring must be surrendered," insisted Wotan.

"It is mine—mine as surely as my eyes and ears-my head and my heart,"

"Is it so?" asked Wotan. "Whence got you the ring? Did you not steal the gold from the Water-nixes, the Daughters of the Rhine? How then can you say it is your own as surely as head and heart?"

So saying he grasped the hand of Alberich, drew the ring from his finger and placed it on his own.

"Now, then, the debt is discharged," said Wotan. "Loge, let him go free."

No sooner was Alberich released, than he stretched himself, rose, and, mad with fury, poured forth his curse on Wotan.

"The gold," shrieked he, "the gold—maybe I stole it—but you steal it from me. If I be a thief, a great thief are you as well. Yours now the treasure, the spoil of the Rhine, and with it ever goes my curse. Cursed be he that takes it, cursed be he who possesses it, cursed in all he undertakes, cursed in every end. It shall break friendships, it shall solve brother-hood, it shall take courage from the heart, for faith give falsehood, for strength give weakness. Keep the ring and the gold, and let the curse work its destiny."

Then he plunged into the chasm, and descended to the nether world from which he had been drawn.

"Now then," said Wotan, "let the giants approach, we are ready for them. Thanks to thy craft, Loge, we shall be able to redeem Freia."

"They come," said Loge. "And here also come Donnar and Froh, and thy good wife, and mother of the gods, Fricka."

The gods appeared; they had lost much of their youth and vigour since Freia had been in the hands of the giants, for they had been deprived of the fruit of Yggdrasil, the life-giving tree, from which she alone could pluck the apples which was their daily repast, and on which they renewed their youth.

Fasolt and Fafner arrived, bringing Freia between them.

"See, ye monstrous beings of the World of Ice," said Wotan, "here is the treasure wherewith we will win back Freia, and keep our compact with you, for we are gods and are bound by our word, which can never be broken."

"Only evaded," threw in Loge, with a laugh.

"In amount it must reach to the height piled up of our staves planted before Freia, so as to completely screen her from your eyes and ours. No less will suffice."

Then the giants drove their staves into the soil, and placed Freia behind them.

At once Froh and Loge brought the gold and heaped it up before the posts, the giants urging them to haste, but also exacting that the gold should be well packed, so that it might completely cover the stakes and choke the gap between them, making a complete screen out of the glittering ore.

Slowly the pile advanced, and still could be seen between the posts the

gleaming hair of Freia; but her face she covered with her hands, so ashamed was she that she should become an object of traffic, and she a goddess. Fricka also was incensed, she felt that this was a dishonour brought on her sex.

And still the giants urged on the heaping up of the treasure, and still Froh and Loge laboured at the mighty pile.

"There," said Loge, "at last all is brought. There remains not a particle of gold more."

"But the pile is not complete," sneered Fafner. "See, through the chink gleams a lock of Freia's hair brighter than all the gold that has been gathered. Come, stuff up the chink. The price is not full paid till that is effected.'

[&]quot;I have nothing further," said Loge.

"Nothing! What is that shining helm? Add that to the pile."

"It is the tarnkappe," said Loge to Wotan. "What shall be done?"

"Thrust it in and satisfy them," ordered Wotan, and Loge added the Helm of Darkness to the heap.

"Now are you satisfied, you Ice giants?" asked Loge, ill-pleased at the loss of the tarnkappe.

Fasolt studied the pile carefully. "I cannot see the fair Freia. Ha! she is freed—yet—stay."

At that moment, in the joy at thought that she was ransomed, Freia had looked up, and as she did so, the glance of her eye was seen through a gap in the pile.

"It is not complete," shouted Fasolt.

"I have looked into her eye. There is one gap more that must be filled. Till

that is choked up, she shall not be returned to you Æsir. Come, it is but a little hole—a trifle will fill it. Bring more gold and plug it therewith."

"There is no more," said Loge.

"Then," said Fafner, "the goddess is ours, and we will carry her away to the realm of eternal ice."

"There is no more gold," said Wotan. "This suffices."

"It does not suffice," retorted the giant.

"The ransom was to be so much as would cover her up so that naught of her should be seen."

"Cast the ring to the heap," advised Donnar.

"I will not part with the ring," replied Wotan.

Then the giants drew Freia forth, and prepared to carry her away with them.

"What!" cried Fricka to Wotan, "will you suffer our sister to be borne away by the Frost-giants to be sealed up in an iceberg for ever, all for the sake of one wretched ring?"

"Remember, All-father!" exclaimed Donnar, "that if she goes, eternal youth and beauty go with her, we shall wither and wax hideous with age, and all our force be gone—lacking the daily meal off the golden apples of youth."

"And who among mortals will look up to us as gods," asked Froh, "when we are shrivelled up like old rotten pears? Who will call on us? Who worship us? What sacrifices will be brought to us? Will the heroes who fall in battle care to come to Walhalla, to the society of gods that are so decrepit that they can neither eat nor drink without assistance?"

Then from out the earth rose Destiny, she who rules all things, gods and men alike, the eternal, the immutable, the one who was and is and will be till Destiny is accomplished over all that lives.

"Wotan," said she, "it is fated. Fate must be fulfilled—from fate is no escape. Surrender the ring. I warn thee, that ring bears with it a curse, and the curse will work out the destruction of all such as possess themselves of it. Surrender the ring."

"There, take it then," said Wotan, and he cast it to the pile.

Then Erda vanished.

"That is well," shouted the giants.
"Now may Freia go free, the Niebelung treasure is ours."

"It is mine," said Fafner.

"Nay, it is mine," retorted Fasolt.

"We will share it," said Fafner. "Take thou a sackful of gold, but the ring is mine. Two cannot wear it. The ring cannot be divided. I keep the ring and one-half of the rest of the plunder."

"Wherefore shouldst thou have the ring?"

"Because I am the stronger, and I have laboured more at the building of Walhalla than thou."

"I am the elder," retorted Fasolt. "I directed all, and thou didst but rear the pile as I ordered."

"I did the work—the main work. Therefore I will have the ring."

"It was I who detected the eye of Freia, and so got the ring added to the pile."

"Let Wotan stand umpire betwixt us," said Fafner.

"I will not have any part in your quarrels," threw in Wotan. "Determine it between you."

"And I," added Fasolt, "it was I who perceived the glitter of Freia's eye between the staves. But for that, the ring would not have been cast to the heap. The ring is mine."

"That never," shouted Fafner, and snatching at the stake he whirled it above his head and smote his brother to the ground, and slew him.

"The curse of the gold is working," laughed Loge. "It is well, Wotan, that thou didst surrender the ring, or thou wouldst have dealt with me or Froh as Fafner has dealt by Fasolt."

Fafner looked on the prostrate form of his brother.

"This is well done," said he; "now

there is no division of the spoil, gold and tarnhelm and ring all belong to me."

Then stooping, he collected the treasure and thrust it into a sack to carry away.

But under the green waters of the Rhine the Water-nixes wailed for the lost store: "We were robbed by the gnome Alberich, and lo! the gods came and took it from him. We trusted that they would have restored to us what was ours, but they have surrendered it to the murderer of his brother, the Giant of Brute Force, the Jötun Fafner, and it is his till one who knows not fear can wrest it from him."

Still wrapped in gloom was the palace of Walhalla that the giants had built, the gloom cast over it by them to hide it from the eyes of the gods till the stipulated payment had been made.

But now Donnar raised his hammer and

smote the rocks and summoned the spirits of the storm to clear away the mists. The winds answered his call, and the blast swept the clouds together into heaps, the lightning flashed, and the thunder rolled: but know all that the lightning is the shooting of the hammer of Donnar across the sky, and the thunder is caused by its crash against all obstructions.

Then, as the vapours curdled and were swept aside, Walhalla stood forth radiant in the sun, that shone on its golden roof, and connecting it with earth, stretching across the Rhine stood the arch of the Rainbow, and this was the bridge by means of which the gods would mount, and this the bridge over which the Valkyrie would conduct the souls of the warriors that die on the battlefield to drink and revel in the halls of Walhalla.

Now when Fafner had collected and carried away the gold, he had cast aside as worthless a sword which had pertained to the treasure, because it was of steel and not of precious metal.

Wotan perceived this, and he took up the sword, and knew it to be of temper unsurpassed, and it was called Nothung. With the sword he saluted the palace that had been erected for him and the other gods.

"Come, my wife—my queen!" said he, taking Fricka by the hand. "Come to the Walhalla that is to be our home—the home of happiness. Come with me over the rainbow bridge."

From the deep of the Rhine still issued the lament of the Water-sprites: "The Rhine-gold has been taken from us, the Rhine-gold that was our charge. Restore to us the Rhine-gold, or Walhalla is doomed, the rainbow bridge will be broken down, the spear of Wotan will be cleft asunder, and heaven fall in ruins, and the reign of the gods will come to an end."

CHAPTER V

THE WOLSUNGS

THERE was once a king called Wolsung who ruled in Hunland, and he had ten sons, the eldest of whom was named Siegmund. There was also a king called Hunding, who reigned over Gothland, and he took to him a wife of the race of the Wolsungs, called Sieglinde.

It fell out one night when the fires were lighted in the hall of Hunding, that a mysterious man came in, clad in a long dark blue mantle, and having a broadbrimmed hat drawn down over his face, but from under the brim could be seen

flashing an eye as of fire. In his hand he bore a sword. Without speaking a word to any he went forward to where the huge trunk of a tree grew in the midst of the hall and sustained the roof, and heaving up the sword with both hands, he smote, and the blade pierced to the heart of the tree and stuck there up to the hilt.

Then he looked round on all who sat upon the benches, and said: "This is the sword Nothung, and to him I give it, who can draw the blade forth from where it is. He will learn that no better sword was ever fashioned."

So saying he turned and vanished from the hall. And those who had seen what had taken place, whispered and said that this was none other than Wotan. Then each of the warriors present essayed to draw the sword out of the trunk, but none could do this. Hunding himself tried and failed. So the sword remained transfixing the tree that sustained the roof.

Now Hunding had sent an invitation to Wolsung to come with all his ten sons to a banquet he had prepared for them, in which they would drink in the Feast of Yule.

So Wolsung and his sons made ready three ships, and they sailed over the winter sea, and came through storm and foam to Gothland. Then they moored their ships in a good haven, and prepared to go to the court of King Hunding.

However, as they were about to leave the harbour they saw Sieglinde riding on a white horse, and she came to them, alighted, and said: "Go back into your ships, turn their heads, draw up the anchors, and make way back to Hunland, for I am certain that treachery is meditated. King Hunding has been collecting men about his hall, and they are armed; but scant preparation has been made for your feasting."

To this replied Wolsung: "That I will never do. Men would jeer at me for flying when no sword had been drawn against me. Moreover, I have sworn that I would never run before sword or fire, but face both, and I will face both now. Before my sons I will not show cowardice. What is fated will be; to all men is allotted to die once, and when that shall be none can tell."

Then Sieglinde wept, and went back sad at heart to the hall of King Hunding.

The Wolsungs armed themselves well, and marched on their way to the court, and when they entered they saw King Hunding on his high seat, and his men-atarms on their benches, and these greeted the Wolsungs with scant courtesy.

Siegmund went forward to the great trunk of the tree and saw the sword fast in it, and he put both hands to the hilt, and drew, and the blade came forth out of the wood.

When Hunding saw that he exclaimed: "That is a good sword, and bites well. Give it to me."

"Give it to thee I never will," said Siegmund. "So long as the sword was in the tree it was for you to draw it forth and make it your own. But now I have possessed myself of it, and I will not surrender it—no, not for thrice its weight in gold!"

When Hunding heard this he gave a

shout, and all his men leaped from their benches, and drew their swords and set upon the Wolsungs, nor was it long before King Wolsung was slain; but the ten brothers were secured alive. And this was the way in which they were taken. The warriors put their shields before them, and formed a ring around the Wolsungs, and closed in upon them as a circle of metal, but the brothers set their backs to one another, and hewed with their swords, but could not hew through the ring of metal that girded them about.

Then, when all the ten Wolsungs were taken, they were fast bound with cords, and they were led forth into the forest, and were set in the stocks, and the stocks were fashioned out of one huge tree, so that in it were held all the ten brothers by the feet.

They sat in the stocks all day, mocked by the men of King Hunding; but when night fell and all was dark, then they were left alone.

The night was bitterly cold, the stars shone, and there was snow on the ground. In the forest could be heard the howling of wolves.

At midnight one huge she-wolf came up to where the Wolsungs sat, and fell on one of the brothers, and bit his throat, and sucked his blood, and then gnawed at his legs till she had crushed the bones, and after that she was able to drag the body away with her over the snow into the forest.

Next morning Sieglinde sent a trusty servant to the brothers with food and drink, and to obtain tidings as to how they fared. They gladly took the provisions supplied, but could furnish in return only the hideous tale of the death of one of their number.

The second day passed as the first. Then King Hunding himself came to see the Wolsungs in the stocks, and the track of blood along which the she-wolf had carried away one of them. The feet remained, which the beast had bitten off, and with these the ruffians of Hunding pelted the Wolsungs, who could not retaliate.

At length night fell again, again cold and starlit, and once more at midnight the huge grey she-wolf appeared, creeping up from the gloom of the forest, and sprang on another of the brothers, and dealt with him as she had dealt with the first.

Next morning came once more the messenger of Sieglinde with food, once more to carry back to his mistress the story of the tragic fate of a second of the brothers.

The third night was dark as pitch, a south-west wind blew and brought up a drizzling rain, and the brothers knew not which was worse, to sit in the bitter frost or in the drenching rain.

It was so dark that they could not see the wolf when she came, but they heard her mumbling at another brother; and when morning broke there was again a Wolsung less, but the feet were left, and now with the six feet of the three brothers who had been devoured, the men-at-arms of King Hunding amused themselves with pelting those who remained.

Towards evening the rain turned to snow, for the wind had shifted to the north-west.

Between the boles of the pines the

seven brothers who still lived could see the gleam of the fire through the round windows in the hall of King Hunding, and they could also see the smoke charged with sparks fly out of the hole in the roof that served as a chimney. They could, moreover, hear the shouts of the merry-makers, and the strains of harp and voice as a bard sang the achievements of the king and his ancestors.

During the night again came the huge wolf, and another of the Wolsungs was devoured.

Sieglinde considered in her mind how she could save those who remained. She was powerless to get their feet out of the stocks, and she knew that daily the brothers were becoming weaker. But she made preparations in the event of her being able to effect their release. At some distance from the hall she employed a thrall in digging out a cave in the rocks, and stocking it with provisions, and all such things as she counted might be required. The way into this cave was concealed by pine branches. Access to it was obtained over the surface of a frozen stream, so that footsteps on it could not be detected unless the ice were covered with snow.

Sieglinde had to observe the utmost caution lest her design should be suspected, and what she was doing should be detected.

There were now but three of the Wolsungs left.

On the following night another was carried off and devoured by the grey wolf.

Before long not one would be left, and Sieglinde pressed on with her preparations. Again a night fell and the ninth of the brothers was taken. Then Sieglinde bade her servant in the evening go to the only remaining Wolsung, who was Siegmund, with a honeycomb in his hand, and smear his face with the honey, and ram the honeycomb into his mouth, and bid him hold on, if possible, till she came to him in the early hours of the morning. She put a sleeping draught into the drink of the king and his men, and they drank that night, and sang, and roared, but it was not till after midnight that they sank into sleep.

Now it chanced that during the night a furious storm of hail and snow fell, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The hall of the king quivered with the blast, but none of the revellers woke.

At midnight came the old grey wolf

off his face. Then it put its tongue into his mouth for the honey that was there. Siegmund at once closed his teeth on the tongue and held fast. The wolf tossed and writhed, and attempted to get free, but Siegmund held tight with his teeth. The brute set its feet against the trunk that served as stocks, and tore at it with its claws, and in its agony and rage broke it up; it wrenched and writhed, and in the end Siegmund tore the tongue out of its head, by the roots, and the brute slank away to die in the woods.

But the stocks were so riven and broken that Siegmund was able to disengage first one foot and then another, and at that moment Sieglinde came to him. With a knife she cut the thongs that bound him, and raised him up. He was weak and exhausted, but she helped him to walk, led him to the frozen stream, and along it till they came to the rock in which was the hiding-place that she had contrived.

She removed the branches that concealed the entrance, and led him within; and she kindled a fire, and warmed his chilled limbs at its glow.

He was so weak that he could not speak; and she remained with him the rest of that night and next day, and ministered to him till he was somewhat recovered.

Then she said to him: "I have left Hunding, and to him will I never return. And see! I have brought you the sword Nothung, that was taken from you when you were bound and set in the stocks, and with it I bid you revenge the wrongs done to your father and mother and to all

our family. Indeed, against my will was I married to Hunding, and henceforth I leave him for ever."

"And for ever," said Siegmund, "you shall abide with me."

When morning dawned and the king and his men awoke, it was discovered that Sieglinde was gone, and that Siegmund was no longer in the stocks, which were rent in pieces. That he had not been devoured by the wolf was surmised, for his feet had not been left as in all the other cases. Moreover, the wolf was found dead under the trees, with the tongue torn out of her mouth.

Then it was shrewdly conjectured that Sieglinde had contrived the escape of Siegmund, and that they had escaped together. Siegmund was long weak and hardly able to bestir himself, so greatly had he suffered from exposure in the stocks; Sieglinde was a skilful nurse, and she attended to him, and as stores were laid up in the cave, they were able to remain concealed for long, without any need for either to leave the place of retreat.

Hunding and his men sought in all directions save that which had been taken by the fugitives. The king was alarmed, for he well knew that the wrong he had done would never be forgiven, and that Siegmund would seek the first occasion for revenge.

So he offered a great sacrifice to Fricka, the goddess of marriage, and he asked her to avenge the outrage he had endured by his wife eloping with his great and mortal enemy, and that an enemy armed with the sword Nothung. Thereat Fricka addressed herself to Wotan, and she gave him no rest by day or by night till he had promised her to come to the aid of Hunding against the Wolsungs.

Now the winter passed, and with the spring the snows thawed, and the ice yielded on the streams. By this time Siegmund was quite restored, and he and Sieglinde escaped to the coast, where he found a vessel, and in it made his way to his own land, where he was received with great joy and taken as king in the place of his father Wolsung. He spent all the rest of the spring and the summer in collecting a fleet and gathering forces to invade Gothland, and when all was complete, the fleet sailed. Sieglinde would not be parted from Siegmund, and accompanied him in his ship, the Dragon, the head of which represented a monster

with gaping jaws, and was covered with gold.

Inspired by Fricka, Wotan called Donnar to his aid, and storms and heavy seas occasioned great distress to the fleet; the ships were scattered, and many were lost with all hands on board, but Siegmund in the *Dragon* and two others reached the harbour in Gothland, and disembarked, and managed, though scanty in numbers, to prepare to attack King Hunding.

News of a hostile landing speedily reached Hunding, and messengers were sent out to collect fighting men, and all who were about his court were armed and made ready for defence.

Then came the steersman of the *Dragon* to Siegmund and said to him, "Bale-fires are burning on every height, and from all sides we can hear the horn calling to

war. We have lost more than half of our ships and men. Were it not best to turn back to Hunland, and then make ready for a second venture next year. We shall be outnumbered by ten to one."

"No," answered Siegmund; "my father said that he had sworn never to fly from fire or steel, and shall I prove less brave than was he? Man can die but once, and none can say when the day of his death will come."

So the little band formed on the beach, and Siegmund said: "Let all stand shoulder to shoulder behind me, and I will lead the way with Nothung. See how this sword cuts." And he cast a feather into the air, and caught it on the blade, and it was cleft in twain. "If Nothung will cut through a feather, will it not cleave

the skulls of men, and smite off their arms at the shoulder?"

They marched forward towards the hall of King Hunding, and he came to meet them in full battle array. His standard was borne before him. It was a dog's head; and on each side were his berserkers. These were men who at the sound of battle and the smell of blood went mad. They gnawed the tops of their shields, they wore no armour, fighting in their kirtles, with shield on one arm and battle-axe, or spear, or sword, in the other.

Now it was seen how large a host had been gathered together.

Then said Hunding: "Let five hundred men go round about and fall on the vessels and burn them; and when they are on fire, then let them turn and come back behind the men of Siegmund and attack them in rear."

Now Siegmund, when he saw the standard of the king, made directly for it. He cast his shield behind his back and hewed with both hands, and wherever he went he mowed men down as though they had been grass.

But the men of the Gothic king closed about the little band, and these latter had to face outward, and fight with desperate valour. Many fell on both sides, but most on that of King Hunding. But as soon as some of his men went down, others stepped into their places, whereas when one fell of the company of Siegmund there was none to fill the gap, only the little band drew closer together. So many were slain by Siegmund that the ground was cumbered. Hunding remained stationary,

whereas Siegmund pressed forward, and he had to stand upon the bodies of the fallen, and there was a great heap. Then one of the berserkers hewed with his axe at the king of the Huns, to cut him above the knee, but before the blow fell, with a sweep of Nothung both of the arms of the berserker were shorn off, and dropped with the hands clasping the axe at his own feet, and he reeled and fell. Another, hoping to avenge his fellow, smote at Siegmund to cleave him between the shoulder-blades, but the king threw his sword back over his head, and with the back stroke cleft the head of the berserker.

Then, with a shout, he leaped down from the heap of the slain, and aimed with Nothung at King Hunding. With the blow he would have cut through helm and head, through the trunk as well to the

waist, had not at that moment a man wearing a slouched hat and a flowing dark over-mantle stepped between and interposed his spear.

When Nothung struck the shaft of the lance it was shivered into pieces.

Siegmund saw that his death-day had come. Then he gathered up the fragments of the sword and gave them to his foot-page and said, "Run, boy, run, and take these to Sieglinde, and bid her give them to my son unborn, that therewith he may avenge his father and all the Wolsungs."

These were his last words, for Hunding ran him through with his lance, and Siegmund fell dead upon the blood-stained plain.

But the boy managed to dive in and out among the combatants, and he ran, and presently saw a great smoke rise up from the burning ships, and then he came on Sieglinde flying towards the forest. All those who had been left to guard the ships had been slain. The boy gave her the broken sword and then fell dead, for he had been wounded sore.

And of all the men who went with Siegmund not one lived—all were slain.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE SMITHY

When Alberich returned to the nether world, his power over the gnomes was gone. His brother Mime, however, had not awaited to see the course of events, but had fled, taking his tools with him, that he might conceal himself from his brother, whose subtlety was so great that he knew not but that at some time he might regain the mastery over the nether world and the race of the Niebelungs, by some other means, even should he be forced to part with the ring.

But he lurked about the entrances to

the under-world till he had ascertained what had happened, and he learned that the golden store, with the tarnkappe and the ring had fallen to Fafner the giant, who had donned the helm of darkness and transformed himself into a dragon.

Now Mime had an object in life, he would labour by all means to work the destruction of Fafner, and to possess himself of the treasure over which he kept guard.

For this purpose he sought out the place where Fafner was, and found that he had made his treasure-house of a cave near the Rhine, and in this he lay over the gold, in the form of a dragon, only leaving it when constrained to creep down to the water to drink.

Accordingly, Mime set up his smithy and made his dwelling in a cave at no

great distance, but in a spot sufficiently concealed as not to be seen by Fafner, and so not arouse his suspicions. But how to overmaster the monster dragon he knew not. He was constrained to await and look for some chance to arise that might afford him the opportunity he desired. Well would it be for him were he able to possess himself of the hoard, and by the virtue of the ring to become lord of the world, and be also able thereby to avenge himself on Alberich his brother for the indignities put on him.

The Niebelungen released from their slavery to Alberich had rebelled against him, when he attempted to exercise authority over them, after he had been deprived of the ring, and they had driven him contumeliously forth from the nether world.

He, as well as Mime, was now possessed by the desire to recover the lost sovereignty, and by the same means. He also knew that Fafner had the gold and the ring, and transformed by virtue of the tarnkappe into a dragon, kept close guard over it. His only chance of recovering the lost Rhine-gold was by outwitting Fafner, for he was well aware that in strength he was no match for him.

With this end in view he approached Fafner and succeeded in so ingratiating himself into his favour as to be taken on by him as a sort of servant or doorkeeper to his cave. His duty was to collect food for the dragon, to raid the country for cattle, which he swept together to the den, where Fafner devoured them. It was also part of his duty to keep watch and ward over the cave, and to signal to the dragon

the approach of human beings. He had further to guard the treasure whilst Fafner crept to the water daily to drink. This last he trusted would afford him his chance. But Fafner was too wary to be away long, and when he went forth to slake his thirst, he wore the tarnhelm, and carried the ring under his wing. The gold without these two objects of special desire to Alberich would not be of sufficient attraction to make him hazard his life for it.

If he could have stolen the ring and the helm of darkness from the dragon whilst he slept, he would have done so, but Fafner never closed an eye.

Thus, the two brothers, Mime and Alberich, were near each other without being aware that it was so, and each was actuated by the same motive, the desire to obtain possession of the ring and the hoard.

It so fell out one day that as Mime was wandering in the forest with his bow and arrows seeking to kill game for his larder, he lighted on a woman who held her newborn babe in her arms, and who was dying. By her side lay a broken sword. Mime stayed his foot and asked who she was, and with feeble voice she replied that her name was Sieglinde, and that her husband Siegmund had been slain in battle by King Hunding. She had fled, and she entreated Mime to take charge of the infant, whose name was Siegfried, and when he became a man to give to him the fragments of his father's sword, the name of which was Nothung, and bid him revenge the blood of Siegmund. Then she died, and Mime took the child with

him to his cave, not out of compassion, for of that he had none, but out of craft and ambition. He knew that the child came of a mighty royal race, and he thought within himself, that as the boy grew up he might be serviceable to him, would hunt for him in the forest, would ply the bellows whilst he toiled at the anvil, and might grow to such strength, that he could employ him to do what he himself lacked the courage and power to effect—the destruction of Fafner. And Fafner slain, he, Mime, could possess himself of the treasure, of which the stripling would know nothing.

It has already been told how that Sieglinde had fled after the slaughter of the Wolsungs and the death of Siegmund. She had wandered several days in the forest, living on roots and berries, before



Mime carrying the infant Siegfried to his cave.



her child was born. Then all her strength and courage failed her.

The sons of Hunding knew nothing of the birth of Siegfried, for he had not seen the light of day when Sieglinde had fled into the forest. They felt quite secure, believing that all the Wolsung race was extirpated, and that none remained who would consider it a duty to avenge the death of Siegmund.

The boy Siegfried grew up in the cave of the dwarf Mime, who treated him harshly, showed him no love, and made the lad work for him. But as Siegfried grew older, he resented what was set him, when the tasks were not such as pleased him. He could not regard Mime as his father, so utterly unlike himself was the hideous dwarf. The birds, when they had young, saw their fledglings grow up like unto

themselves in plumage, in colour, in notes of song, in habits. It was so also with the beasts. The hare, the fawn, the bear had their young, and when these grew to full perfection they also resembled their parents. It was so with the plants. The oak shed its acorns, and from these acorns grew trees like the parent oak in leaf, in growth, in nature. The wild strawberry shed its crimson fruit, and the fruit strewed its seed on the bank, and every seed sprang up, and in turn it produced leaf and flower and crimson berry like the plant from which it had come. But when Siegfried looked at himself in the waters of the lake, he saw that he was unlike Mime in every line of feature, in his build, and, as he well perceived, also in disposition. For Siegfried was frank, good-natured, and generous, whereas Mime was reserved,

ill-tempered, and suspicious. He was for ever grumbling. Nothing that Siegfried did met with his approval, or, at all events, none was expressed. Mime, on the other hand, saw with secret satisfaction that the boy was growing to be a man of noble proportions, of indomitable energy, and of extraordinary strength. He had hair fair and golden, that flowed about his face like the rays about the sun. His eyes were flashing, and when he was angry they were terrible, so that Mime shrank, and never dared to incense his adopted son beyond a certain point. Moreover, there was an intelligence and searching light in them that alarmed the dwarf. He feared lest Siegfried should read his soul and detect the craft that lurked there and the designs he had formed for making use of the youth to obtain his own ends.

Siegfried delighted in frightening the dwarf. He would catch the bear or the wild boar in the forest, and bring it to the cave, there to let it loose, when the gnome would flee to some place of security and scream with fear and rage.

When Siegfried had relieved the wretched Mime from his terror by removing the wild beast, he became more puzzled over the contrast between himself and the dwarf.

"How is it," he asked, "that thou art a coward, and I know not fear? Tell me, Mime, who was my mother? I never got my bodily frame nor my heart from such as you."

"Bah! you are a fool. I am father and mother in one to you."

"That cannot be. In the spring-time I have seen the birds consort; the female

makes her nest, and the male bird brings her worms, and protects her; he sings to her on the neighbouring bough. Hark to the nightingale and the thrush, they carol to their pretty wives, the mothers of their young, as they brood over their eggs."

"I never sang to any wife," said Mime.

"That I can well believe, therefore thou canst not be my father."

"Aye, thy father am I; I have nurtured thee, and have taught thee all thou knowest."

"That thou hast brought me up I know full well. But of this I am as well assured, thou art no father of mine. A father loves his child—I have received no love from thee." Then bursting into wrath, he rushed to the anvil, where lay a sword that Mime had been fashioning, and threatened the dwarf with it. "Tell

me," he said, "who were my father and mother, or with this blade I will split thy skull."

"The sword, silly fool, is one I have made for you. Will you kill me with it?"

"For me! It is a poor tool," said Siegfried, his anger cooling. He brandished it and struck the anvil, and at once it flew into splinters. "Bah! I want a better blade than this. I will bind thee till thou tellest me the truth about myself, who was my father and who my mother."

"Ungrateful boy," snarled the dwarf, "thus to treat me who have been so good to thee. When thou wast little, I nursed thee, I fed thee, I rocked thee to sleep, I clothed thee; and now in ingratitude thou turnest against me, and threatenest me. There—eat the supper I have pre-

pared for thee, roast meat and soup. Whilst thou hast been disporting thyself in the forest, watching the billing and cooing of the birds, and studying thy face in the pool, I have drudged here cooking a meal for thee."

"I want none of thy cooking. It is I who provide the food for you and myself, I in the chase. It is the fire that does the cooking. I will forswear thee for ever and run away and do all for myself unless thou tell me the truth about my origin."

The dwarf saw that he could no longer refuse or evade giving the headstrong youth what he desired.

"Sit down, and be quiet," said Mime, "and I will tell thee all. One day as I was traversing the green wood I found a dying woman under a tree, and in her

arms was a newborn babe, and that babe was thyself."

"But how about my mother? where is she?"

"She died, and in dying committed thee to my care. Truly have I fulfilled her last wish. I nursed thee, I fed thee, I rocked thee to sleep, querulous brat that thou wast."

"Then where got I my name?"

"The name thou bearest is that thy dying mother gave thee."

"And my mother, who was she?"

"How can I say?" answered Mime evasively. "If I heard it, it is forgotten."

"Then who was my father?"

"Him I never saw," replied the dwarf.

"But did not my mother name him?"

"She said that he was slain, she said

no more. But I have been father and mother to thee, nursing thee, feeding thee, clothing thee, rocking thee, putting up with thy peevish humours."

"I must have some evidence that this story is true, for well I know thee to be a liar. Did my mother leave no token by which I might trace out my parentage?"

"Token! a precious token indeed, all the legacy of thy parents is a broken sword." Mime produced the fragments of Nothung.

Siegfried took them, handled them, and observed them well.

"Broken," said he meditatively, "the blade may be, but the steel is finer than any of thy forging, Mime. Now I leave the fragments with thee to weld together. Then shall I go forth and wander through the wild woods. Naught holds me here—neither father nor mother, nor force. As the finch flies from bough to bough, as the salmon swims in the river and leaps the cataracts, as the wind that blows o'er wold and fen I shall be free."

And away he ran.

"What shall I do?" mused Mime.
"Him I need, for him have I reared to slay Fafner and obtain for me the Niebelungen store. And how can I forge these fragments of steel? It is beyond my power to do that; but to retain Siegfried I must exercise my best arts, for his arm I need where mine is weak. It is wit that wins the world and directs force."

CHAPTER VII

A CONTEST OF WIT

Suddenty there appeared to Mime a stranger, and yet one whom he seemed to know by his mantle of dark blue and his slouched hat. It was Wotan, the wanderer over the earth.

Mime looked at him with fear. He could not be sure that it was Wotan, for he had seen him but for a brief space in the nether world, so he asked suspiciously who the intruder was, and what was his object in entering the smithy.

"I am a Wanderer, I am known by

that name, for I wander at pleasure over the world."

"Then I pray you wander further and disturb me not. See, I have work in hand, and cannot waste words on a traveller that is nameless."

"Hospitality is the rule with men," said Wotan, "and only churls refuse it."

"Call me a churl or what you will, I provide not hospitality here."

"Evil is the heart that refuses it to a wanderer."

"Evil is my lot. Evil is my dwelling. Evil is my work, and the rust of evil may well have worked into and cankered my heart."

"You know not, Smith, but what I may repay hospitality. I have the gift of foresight, and I can tell you what will be in the future."

"Tell it elsewhere, I have but one object in view, and that I hold ever before me, and for that wish, and that in the end, I will work with my hands and forge."

"Wish will win nothing without wit."

"Wit I have that suffices me. Therefore, wise wanderer, show your wit by going elsewhere."

"Not so, Smith. Where there is wit it must clash with other wits. Show me yours and I will show you mine. Come, Smith, let it be a contest between us for a prize, and the stake shall be my head."

"As you will, Wanderer, I would be rid of thee. If I get thy head I will send it rolling from my door, and cast thy trunk after it. I will set thee three questions; if thou failest to answer any one of the three, thy head is forfeit,

and I rid my forge of an unwelcome guest."

"Well, then, Smith, try my wit, and see if it will guard my head from a fall."

"Wanderer, who hast wandered over the wide world, and picked up knowledge as a fowl gathers grains, answer me in the first place, What is that race which was born in the nether world, where sun and moon and stars never shine, where grass never grows, where birds never sing, and fishes swim not, though water there be?"

"Not hard to say," replied Wotan; "for there have I been. In the Nibelland live the black Elves, over whom at one time Alberich obtained the rule, and whom he drove as slaves to work for him, aye, and his brother also—whom I take it thou art."

"Thou hast answered aright. Thy wit is more than I wotted."

"Set me then the second question."

"It seems to me, Wanderer, that thou hast burrowed into the earth, but knowest thou who dwell on the surface apart from men, in the realm of Eternal Winter?"

"That also I can answer, for well am I acquainted with them—they are the Jötuns or Giants, of whom Fasolt and Fafner were the chiefs. They won from Alberich the wondrous hoard that he had gathered through the labours of the gnomes of the earth, and they fell out over the treasure. Fasolt died under the stake of his brother, and now the Niebelungen hoard is possessed by Fafner alone."

"Great is thy knowledge and keen thy observation," said the dwarf, "and more is thy wit than I thought thou couldst have."

"Then set me the third question," said Wotan.

"Much, Wanderer, you have learnt in the nether world and in the world above ground. Now rede me what race is that that lives in the welkin above?"

"The welkin above is the abode of the Æsir, the gods of Walhalla. Wotan is there supreme, holding in his hand the spear, the shaft of which is fashioned out of the tree Yggdrasil, and on it are inscribed runes of might. He controls all, all in the welkin world, and all the elves below the earth; and men on the face of the earth worship him, and he also can control the giants of Jötunheim."

"Well hast thou answered, stranger, so go thy way, and carry hence thy head upon thy shoulders. But know of a certainty, hadst thou not redeemed it, I would have chopped it off on my anvil."

"I have saved my head, Smith; but I go not yet. The gambling has been all on one side. Now then, it is thy turn. Gage me thy head. I will ask thee three questions, and if thou failest to answer one of them thy head is forfeit to me."

"I will not proceed with the contest," said Mime sulkily. "Enough! thou hast saved thy head, get thee gone at once."

"I do not go on these terms. I played fair with thee. I pledged my head. It is thy turn to pledge thine. Come—make ready to answer my questions."

"I am unwilling. Long is it since I left the world of the gnomes, and I have had converse with none since, and the edge of my wit is dulled." Then to him-

self he said, "I know now who this Wanderer is. I suspected it from the first; but I am aware that none other could know those things I inquire of, and I have caught a glimpse of his one fiery eye glaring at me from under his slouched hat." Then he said aloud and roughly: "Well, Wanderer, set me thy questions. I know thee now, and that I cannot resist thy will."

Then said Wotan: "Tell me what is the noble race of men that have been dealt with severely by Wotan, a race that has ever been one of heroes, knowing not fear, turning not back before steel or fire?"

"I know little and care less about the warriors among men," replied Mime; "but such a simple question as this is easily answered. The race thou askest after, Wanderer, is that of the Wolsungs. Siegmund and Sieglinde were of the stock, and of them came Siegfried, the steadiest and most dauntless of the Wolsung race."

"Well answered, Smith," said Wotan, "and your head is safe for the nonce. Now answer me the second question. A wily, treacherous Niebelung has Siegfried under his custody, and his aim is to employ this Wolsung youth to slay Fafner, who holds the Niebelung hoard, and the ring of the Rhine-gold, in order that he may have it all for his own, and so make himself Master of the World. Answer me, Smith, with what sword alone can Fafner be slain?"

"Nothung is the sword, that was shivered against the ash-tree stem of Wotan's spear. The fragments are in the hands of a cunning smith, who knows full well that with Nothung will Fafner some day be slain."

"Thou hast answered shrewdly, Smith, and well I know that thou art he who hast the stripling of the Wolsungs in thy keeping, and that thou reckonest by his aid to master the Niebelung treasure. Now rede me my third question. Say, who alone can weld together the fragments of the sword Nothung?"

Mime pondered. Presently in great confusion he answered: "There I am at fault. Vainly have I attempted to repair the splinters. Woe is me that I have been brought into such straits. Now I shall lose my head, for this answer I cannot give."

"Well, now, Smith, three questions have been asked. Two you have answered, but failed in the third. Your head is forfeit, and I have a right to take it from off your shoulders. But I am not of such a crabbed and resentful nature as are you, and I give you your head to make use of as best you may, till such time as he who knows not fear is ready to be my executioner, and he will strike it off; and know this—it is he alone who can weld the shattered sword."

Then the Wanderer vanished into the woodland outside, and left Mime confounded and alarmed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WELDING OF NOTHUNG

MIME cowered in his cavern. He had escaped with his life, but his life was threatened.

To him who knew not what fear was, Wotan had left the task of taking Mime's head from his shoulders.

But also, only he who knew not what fear was could re-weld the broken sword of the Wolsungs.

As Mime brooded over his difficulties, now swayed by his personal fears, then by his ambition to become master of the Niebelungen hoard, he was startled by

the boisterous entrance of Siegfried, who had returned for the sword, which he had bidden the dwarf repair for him.

Mime protested his inability to do this

"I have not the skill. I have hammered out fine blades, but you have broken them all. You have tested my abilities. Clever I am in most things, but my skill reaches not so far."

Then Siegfried noticed how quaking Mime was, not yet recovered from the fright caused him by his contest with the Wanderer, and shaken by apprehensions for himself.

"Look you here, Mime," said the young man; "I will have my father's sword, and with it cut my way through the world."

"Aye, aye, cut your way through the

world," mocked the gnome. "But not before I have taught you one thing that was laid on me by your mother with her dying breath."

- "What was that?"
- "To fear."
- "To fear-I know not what it is."
- "What, boy, have you not known fear when wandering in the forest at night, and the wolves have followed you, baying at your heels, their fiery eyes gleaming on you, panting to leap on you and tear you?"
- "Never; I have kept them at a distance with my club."
- "Not when the vivid lightning has cleft the sky, and struck and riven the oak, followed by the booming thunder? Has that not made your heart to quake?"
 - "Never," replied Siegfried. "I have

laughed for joy at the war of the elements, and only desired it might have been a war on earth in which I might take part-with the lightning flashes of swords and the thunder of the clash of arms."

"Then hearken to me. It is needful that one who goes forth to hew his way through the world should be acquainted with fear. How else can he avoid the perils that beset his path? Why does the bird fly away when thou drawest near? Because the bird knows that if it remains seated on the bough when thou dost approach, it will fall a victim to the arrow. Why do the wolves not at once leap at thy throat, but keep a little way in rear as thou stridest along? Because they fear thy cudgel. Why does the silver trout dart from thee when it sees thee among the bushes on the river bank? Because it

stands in fear of the hook and the net. Why does the hound not tear its feet and rend its skin among the brambles? Because it fears their thorns, and so avoids them. Fear is the necessary acquisition of everything that lives. By the possession of fear alone can it preserve life from destruction. If the babe did not have fear, it would thrust its fingers into the fire. Therefore is fear all-needful, and that thy mother knew well. For this reason, loving thee, she bade me instruct thee how to fear, and woe is me! hitherto I have neglected this part of thy education."

"Well then, goblin, teach it me; but you will find me no apt scholar in this."

"There is, not far from here, beyond the forest, where thou hast never trodden, a cave, deep and dark and horrible, strewn without with bones. In that deep hole dwells a monstrous dragon, his name is Fafner, and Fafner will teach thee fear."

"Show me the way to the cavern."

"I will show it, but unarmed thou canst not go."

"I can well believe that. Give me Nothung. I will force Fafner with the steel to disclose to me the mystery of fear."

"The sword Nothung is all broken to fragments."

"Have you tried to re-fashion it?"

"I have tried and failed-as already I told thee."

"Give me the splinters and let me essay the task that is beyond thy powers."

"What is to be done?" thought Mime. "Nothung can only be made new by one who has never felt fear, and only one who has never felt fear will be my bane." Then aloud he said: "Idle boy, how can you accomplish what is beyond my skill? A poor apprentice you have been at the forge. Me have you left to make weapons for you, and such as I have made, you have broken with your clumsy ways."

"I will essay it. What is beyond your powers may be within mine. Mother-wit will help me. Out of the way, meddle not with me. From you I could have learned only how to forge badly, and such accomplishment I need not."

Then Siegfried went to the forge, and raked the coals together, and quickened up the fire with the blast of the bellows.

"See, Mime," said he; "what is this charcoal but old dead trees? I hewed down the giants of the forest, I piled up

the logs, and covered them with clay; and set them alight, and so they were brought to blackness and death. Here are the ash and the oak that once bore leaves and harboured the birds, and produced their seed and acorns. All dead now. But what is the fire in the charcoal, but the breaking out of life again, the life that has slept in the charcoal? Why should not the sword of my father also have a new life? I will infuse into it the new fiery life of the charcoal that was in the tree. Where are the fragments?"

Then Siegfried having found the splinters, filed them down.

"You can do nothing without a flux," said Mime, watching him uneasily.

"Out with your flux, I need it not. I will send the world-life that was in the tree and slept in the charcoal into the broken metal of the sword. I need no flux save that, and the sweat of my brow, and the zeal of my heart. These compounds will make the only flux I need."

"The boy will achieve that where I failed," muttered the gnome; "let it be—so only can the sword be re-made by means of which Fafner can be slain, and the Niebelungen gold and ring be obtained. But how shall I get rid of the stripling when he has killed the dragon? If I do not that, he will be the bane of me—he the fearless one—so did Wotan prognosticate. Wit must come to my aid."

Then Siegfried having filed up the fragments cast them into a crucible, which he placed in the fire, and began lustily to ply the bellows, and as he worked, for joy of heart he sang—

"All hail to old Nothung, the blue steel blade That smitten was shivered and broke! In the blast of the furnace in crucible laid. Then healed by the hammer stroke. The puff of the bellows that wakes the coal On the hearth to fury and roar, Oh ho! the shattered will now make whole. Be better than ever before.

O! the wheel of Life, it will turn and turn, And what tho' Fate look cruel, The sun that is shorn will more vigorous burn, For in Death is Life's renewal.

Oh, Nothung! Nothung! tho' laid aside As idle and refuse steel, With new fire tested, by hammer tried Will a wondrous life reveal. For the Old goes out, and the New comes in, And the broken again is sound; The beaten in battle, next day shall win: There is no Death-only Rebound. For the wheel of Life, it will turn and turn, And what tho' Fate look cruel. The sun that is shorn will more vigorous burn, For in Death is Life's renewal."

Mime continued to watch Siegfried, and to mutter to himself: "I see that he will re-fashion the sword, that is now inevitable. He will also slay Fafner; so all my craft must be exercised to overreach this booby, and rob him of the results of his victory over the dragon. Happily he knows nothing of what is concealed in the den of Fafner, nothing of the value of gold and the virtue of the ring. All his ambitions are for a boisterous life of brawling. I know how to circumvent him. Wit is ever the master of brute force. Wearied with the fight with Fafner, he will seek rest. He will be parched with thirst, and then my opportunity will have arrived. I will prepare a draught of simples I have collected, the deadly nightshade and the hellebore and the aconite, and these I will distill to so strong and poisonous an essence that a drop will suffice mingled with the drink

I offer him, which will send him to sleep. Then, when he is senseless, with the sword Nothung he is now so merrily forging I will smite off his head. So wit finds a way, and conquers force."

Starting up he brought forth various ingredients and poured them into a vessel, to set on the fire. There was no saying but that Siegfried might dash forth from the smithy, so soon as the sword was serviceable, and go in quest of Fafner. It would be advisable, therefore, for him to have the poisonous brew ready against all emergencies.

Meanwhile Siegfried had poured the molten steel into a sword mould, and then proceeded to temper it. And still in gladness of heart he sang-

[&]quot;All hail to the copper and golden leaf, All hail to the dwindling sun,

To the arrish field, and the garnered sheaf, To the season's labours done.

The frost has sharpened the morning's breath, On the chilled herb hangs the tear, For the summer is over, in cometh Death,

Decease of the worn-out year.

But the wheel of Life, it will turn and turn, And what tho' Fate look cruel, The sun that is shorn will more vigorous

burn,
For in Death is Life's renewal.

All hail to the leaf that is wrinkled and sear, When the bud behind it swells.

Youth leaps from decay, and the shortened day Of the coming springtide tells.

And the ploughshare gleams, and the furrow steams,

Now the earth has yielded her spoil, And the winter's rain falls never in vain, It blesses the ploughman's toil.

O! the wheel of Life, it will turn and turn,
And what tho' Fate look cruel,
The sun that is shorn will more vigorous burn,
For in Death is Life's renewal."

"But," exclaimed Siegfried, breaking off his song, "what is the elf about with

his pot? Whilst I am forging a sword, are you cooking sauces?"

"My dear boy," replied Mime caressingly, "we have reversed our places. You are now the smith, and I the servant. If you hammer and weld, I must undertake the household work. We cannot live without eating, and a bowl of soup when we are weary will renew the failing strength."

Siegfried, regarding his proceedings no closer, now began to hammer out the sword on the anvil, and as he did so he sang as before-

"All hail to old Nothung, the blue steel blade That smitten was shivered and broke! In the blast of the furnace, in crucible laid, Then healed with the hammer stroke, The puff of the bellows that wakes the coal On the hearth to fury and roar, Oh ho! the shattered will now make whole, Be better than ever before. O! the wheel of Life, etc.

Oh, Nothung! Nothung! tho' laid aside
As idle and refuse steel,
With new fire tested, by hammer tried,
Will a wondrous life reveal.
For the Old goes out, and the New comes in,
And the broken again is sound;
The beaten in battle next day shall win:
There is no Death—only Rebound.
For the wheel of Life, etc."

"Ha, ha!" mocked Mime, laying aside the poisonous condiment. "The wheel of Life does turn, and turn up the least expected events. We shall see. The wheel with me has gone down very low. I was made a bondman by my brother Alberich, he constrained me to toil for him in the nether world; for him I fashioned the ring, for him the tarnhelm. I was a dull fool thus to suffer him to use me as his tool, to make those things that served to my undoing. The ring I fabricated with my

own hands, little dreaming what its power would be. The tarnkappe was also of my making, and I was a blind fool not to perceive that Alberich would employ it to enable him to flout and mock and maltreat me. Well, I am in better state now, for I am my own master. The wheel has begun to turn-and it will turn up good luck for me. It is a beginning that this clown has succeeded in re-welding the Wolsung sword, for that alone will pierce Fafner to the heart. It is well that I have brought him up, the fearless one, to wield that sword, and to win for me the Niebelungen hoard. Ha! when I am master of that gold, I shall be master of gods and men, for all lust after gold; and the ring will give me domination over the whole world, and gods and dwarfs and men will bow

down before me, the lord of all things in heaven and earth and in the nether world."

Siegfried had all but completed his work. He was now putting a handle to the blade, and he sang—

"Oh, Nothung! Nothung! in holder fast

I fix thee to serve my hand.

The failing father who held thee last
Died gripping the shattered brand.

But now the son, with his youth aflame,
Has fashioned the blade anew,
It glances and gleams as a vision in dreams,
The best of all swords, and true."

Then suddenly he raised the weapon and brought it down on the anvil, which it cleft asunder.

CHAPTER IX

BEFORE THE DRAGON'S LAIR

ALBERICH had served Fafner for long. He who had once lorded it over the elves of the nether world, making them his slaves, ministering to his wants and his avarice, was now reduced to much the same condition himself.

The dragon was a hard taskmaster. He forced Alberich to keep watch all night and to signal to him the approach of danger.

Not once had an occasion presented itself to the dwarf to get at what he desired, the tarnhelm and the ring, and

to overpower and slay the dragon was beyond his powers. Fafner, covered with impenetrable scales, was vulnerable only in one spot—beneath him, in his breast over his heart—and this he never exposed. Moreover, Alberich had no weapon so keen that it could penetrate to the heart. But still he waited on, hoping against hope, and fearing lest the spoil after which he lusted should fall to other hands than his own.

The cave inhabited by Fafner was in the face of a cliff. The rocks around were splintered and full of crevices, out of which bushes grew. The soil was trampled by the monster, and strewn with the relics of his feasts, and the grass burnt up by his poisonous breath.

One night Alberich was keeping watch as usual. The weather was tempestuous,

the wind moaned among the branches of the trees, and tossed about the coarse shrubs that trailed among the rocks.

There was moonlight, but the face of the planet was hidden by drifting masses of rain-charged cloud. Alberich shivered with cold, and paced the trodden ground to keep himself warm. Would the day never come for which he looked, when he could avenge himself on Fafner for his long servitude, and by securing the treasure hidden in the cave make himself lord of all?

He heard the far-off roar of wind as it passed through the forest, and then the blast came upon him, and nearly blew him from his feet. He clung to the rocks for safety, when suddenly, after the wind had passed, he saw a dark form appear.

Then the moon broke forth from the clouds and revealed to his sight a tall man wrapped in a long cloak, with a slouched hat on his head, and bearing in his hand a mighty spear.

Instantly he knew him. This was Wotan, who had robbed him of his treasure.

In a paroxysm of rage he addressed him. "Wotan, thou wanderer, what has brought thee hither?" he exclaimed. "Art thou come to see and gloat over my misery? I was the king of the gnomes; I had as mine own all the gold veins of the earth from which to draw riches. I was possessor of the Niebelungen hoard. Of all hast thou plundered me. And for what? To redeem Freia at no cost to thyself. Thou didst covenant with the giants

to build thy Walhalla, because in thy pride thou wouldst have a palace worthy for the Æsir to dwell in, that thou mightest strut and flourish as a god before the sons of Earth, brought to banquet with thee from the battle-field. Puffed up with vanity, thou didst think thy sister Freia too good to be given to the Frost-giants, who could build where all the gods were helpless to lay one stone on another. And to redeem the pink-faced, blue-eyed Freia from them, thou didst defraud me. God art thou! Bah! a scurvy thief."

"Silence, hideous gnome," retorted Wotan. "The Rhine-gold was not thine. Thou didst steal it from the Water-sprites."

"That may be, Wotan," said Alberich; "the god thieved what the elf had stolen. He gave to the Ice-giants what was not his. Thief of a thief at least art thou."

"The end justifies the means," replied the Wanderer. "A goddess could not be sacrificed to the giants, and the gold was valueless under the waters of the Rhine; and in thy hands it was put to an evil purpose, to enserf thy brethren."

Alberich laughed mockingly. "For what are you come hither now? Do you think with that spear to pierce the hide of the dragon? Lusting still after gold and power, would you wrest from him what you freely paid over to him? Bah! He is safe from you. That spear of yours would split against his scales. It would snap as a straw."

"I have not come for that," replied the Wanderer. "I have come on my way

as I walk over the wide world to see how all fares."

"With a liquorish eye—thy one eye after the gold. I know thee well. But remember my curse laid on the hoard. Whoso wins it, whoso holds it—the doom lies on him. It will divide kindred, it will turn hearts, it will deaden love, it will breed hate, it will inspire suspicion. There is no escape from the doom. My curse is irrevocable. And the curse now lies on Fafner. Long has he possessed the gold-and it led him to slay his brotherbut for ever it cannot remain with him. His day must come. On him the doom must fall. Only when the ring returns to my hand is all again made well. Then, Wotan, fear for thyself and for Walhalla. When I receive the ring, my power returns, and I will bring on you gods all the hosts of the

nether world, and with our pickaxes we will rip out the stones, and break down the walls of Walhalla, and strike out the keystone of the arch of the rainbow bridge."

"I know the intent of your evil heart," replied Wotan; "but I fear you not. Only he who wins the ring can exercise this power, and thou hast not yet won it."

"So you yourself will attempt to wrest it from Fafner?"

"No, not I. Destiny, which is above gods and gnomes and men, has not ordained that I should have it. But I will tell you what you know not, miserable gnome. Your brother Mime, whom you once so ill-used, is on his way hither, and with him he brings a stripling, who fearless will pluck the fruit for which you lust."

"What, is he, this stripling, also after the gold?" "No; of that he knows nothing."

"And thou wilt assist him?"

"I assist him not. Destiny rules over gods and men. The gold will fall to whom it is fated. But this I do know, and this I say, that Fafner's end is near, his life stands in jeopardy. Ho! Fafner, awake!"

"Who troubles my sleep?" asked the transformed giant from his cave.

Then shouted Wotan: "Danger draws near, come forth!"

"Come forth, Fafner," called Alberich. "I am thy true friend and faithful watchman. Wake and come forth that I may devise with thee what is to be done."

"Danger! what danger? I fear none. Strong are my jaws, poisonous my breath. I am sleepy; leave me alone."

"Alone thou shalt remain, and secure,"

said Alberich. "But thou needest one to guard thy den. Give me the ring—then I shall have the power to protect thee—and sleep on."

"I lie on the gold, and none can get it—neither it nor the ring, so long as I lie there," said Fafner.

"Fool!" scoffed Wotan. "Dost thou think to wheedle the ring from Fafner by such a sorry expedient? Here comes Mime—he you may better overreach. But Destiny will fulfill itself."

Then there rose a blast of storm wind, and with the blast the Wanderer was gone.

Morning slowly broke, and Alberich crept into a cleft of the rocks to watch the approach of his brother and the youth of whom Wotan had spoken.

Presently he heard voices, then saw

the two enter on the platform before the dragon's lair. Siegfried was girded with his father's sword, re-fashioned by him.

"This is the spot," said Mime. "See the scattered bones and the scorched herbage; look at the marks of the feet of the monster, where the soil is moist. Now do you fear?"

"Fear! I have no fear," answered Siegfried. "As yet I have seen nothing wonderful to awe me."

"Silly boy," said Mime. "You have not yet seen the dragon. When you see him your heart will quake, even as does mine at being so near to his den. How can you contend with him, when from his jaws pours a stream of poison?"

"I shall shift out of its course."

"And with his sharp teeth he can bite through the body of an ox."

- "Oh, Mime, he shall not get his teeth into me."
- "But his tail—he will curl it about you."
- "I shall keep an eye on that twisting tail, and pull it, if he try pranks with me. Where is his heart?"
 - "In his body, of course."
 - "But where?"
- "I never put my hand on it to feel it beat."
- "In his breast I trow," said Siegfried, "where all have their hearts."
- "No doubt it is so. But, boy, I may not stay here. I fear for myself. It is folly in you—and I have no such folly as to desire to look in the face of Fafner. I quake even near the cave when he lies asleep."
 - "Then get you gone. Leave me to

deal with him, and when I have seen the monster and have slain him, then I shall be able to tell you, Mime, whether I have learned what it is to fear."

Mime now retired, thinking, "Well would it be if each, Fafner and Siegfried, were to prove the other's bane, then all the hoard would be mine, with the ring and the helm."

CHAPTER X

THE FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

When Mime was gone, Siegfried cast himself under a lime-tree, and waited till the monster should appear. The sun arose, and filled all the world with light and beauty. The insects hummed, the birds twittered, and the sweetbriar exhaled its fragrance.

A strange yearning came over the heart of the youth. He thought of his father and his mother, and he wondered what love could be that bound two so close into one. He had never seen a maiden, but Mime had spoken of girls in the world, and had described them to him,

and his imagination had done the rest. He idealized them as a sort of elves of light, radiant in beauty and of every perfection conceivable. In his dreams he saw them. They stooped over him and kissed his lips.

And now, in the soft morning air, with the linden leaves bathed in honey-dew above him, with the murmur of the flies, with the golden sunlight playing among the leaves, he thought not of Fafner and the coming struggle, only of his night visions of fair maidenhood.

Lying thus, looking up into the quivering green leaves, he sang—

"O lime-tree, wet with honey-dew,

Honey-dew, sweet honey-dew,

The honey to thy leaves belonging;

With wingèd creatures round thee thronging,

To sip the honey-dew,

The honey-dew

That drips from thee.

The fragrant air is full of song
From flutterers the whole day long,
Because of thee, fair tree,
Blossoming, sunny,
Because of thy honey.

O maidenhood, besprent with dew,

Honey-dew, sweet honey-dew,
Elixir from thy lips distilling,
My life with love and rapture filling,
Sipping the honey-dew,
The honey-dew
That streams from thee!
Thy very atmosphere is love
Inhaled by all that round thee move,
O maidenhood, fair tree,
Flowering, sunny,
Burdened with honey.

O maidenhood, transcendent, true,

Honey-dew, sweet honey-dew,
Here, from afar, I look on, longing
To reach thee,—thee it would be wronging
To sip the honey-dew,

The honey-dew

That streams from thee!

No wings have I to thee to soar,
Let one drop fall on me—no more

I ask of thee, fair tree,

Flowering, sunny,

Distilling honey."

Lying under the tree, Siegfried listened to the twittering of the finches in the underwood, and the song of the thrush in the tree. He wondered what all these voices meant. Was there speech in the bird which man could not understand? If so, was it possible to obtain the key to their language? And, finally, would it be worth the pains to acquire a knowledge of their talk, if talk they did?

He cut a rush and fashioned for himself a pipe, and on it he strove, but with scant success, to imitate the songs of the birds.

After amusing himself thus for some time he became impatient at his failure, cast his pipe away, and blew a call on his silver trumpet.

This roused Fafner from his slumber, and he crawled forth to look about him, to ascertain whence came the challenge, and to creep down to the water, there to take his morning draught.

Now Siegfried sprang from the turf, grasped his sword and prepared for conflict, and as the monster reared itself he smote it in the breast.¹

¹ Here it must be observed that the story of the fight with the dragon is told in two different ways. According to German tradition, it was a good standup battle, in which Fafner endeavoured to get Siegfried into his jaws, to scorch him up with his fiery breath, to paralyze him with his venom. But the young hero was too wary for the monster, and he eluded all his attempts. Then Fafner reared himself up and threw himself with his full weight on the stripling, and in so doing discovered his vulnerable breast. At once Siegfried ran forward and plunged his sword into the heart of the monster.

But the version of the story current among Norsemen is different. According to them, Siegfried dug a pit in the track down which Fafner crawled to the water, and covered this with branches and with earth; then he concealed himself in the pit, and when the dragon drew its scaly body over it, he was able

Fasner, so soon as he felt the sword pierce him, rolled over on his side, and knew full well that he must die.

"Who urged you on to this, boy?"

through the interstices of the boughs to aim direct at the heart.

If we look at the matter gravely, we can see that the probability is that the Norse version is correct. This was a case in which the wit of man was matched against bestial force, and man prevailed, not by strength of arm but by the exercise of his intelligence.

The Germans, however, desirous of magnifying the physical force of their hero, would not admit the pit story, and so lost the true significance of the tale. They knew that Perseus, S. George and other heroes of ancient story killed their dragons by hacking at them with sword, or tilting at them with lance, and they placed the national hero Siegfried on a level with them in prowess; whereas, if the Norse story be the true account, he stood a head and shoulders above these other legendary dragon slayers, in that he overmastered Fafner by the exercise of his wits and not by strength of arm alone.

But so soon as the monster receives his death wound discrepancy in the accounts ceases.

asked the dragon; "this never came to your mind unsuggested. Tell me further who thou art?"

"Little do I know of my kindred, nor can I say fully who I am," said Siegfried.

"Then learn whom thou hast slain. I am of the ancient race of the Frost-giants, who ruled the world and held it bound in chains of ice, before ever the gods came on earth and drove back the realm of winter. Fasolt and Fafner were we, and for the sake of the fatal gold I slew my brother. Now am I the last to perish, and that by the hand of a beardless boy. But take heed to thyself, youth; there is treachery behind thee. Thou wast incited to this, as I can well surmise, by one who lusted to rob me of the hoard, and used thy hand to serve his purpose. Be wary, trust him not."



The Fight with the Dragon.



So saying Fafner died.

Then Siegfried drew the sword Nothung from the body of the dragon, into which he had plunged it to the hilt. As he did this the blood ran over the blade and the handle and scalded his fingers.

Feeling the smart from the hot blood, Siegfried put his hand to his mouth, and so with the blood bathed lips and tongue.

All at once his ears were opened, and he heard the voices of the birds and could understand their speech. And he heard the thrush in the linden call-

"Ha, ha! Siegfried has slain the dragon, and now will he win the Niebelungen hoard hidden in the lair of the monster; where also is the ring that will give him lordship over the world, and also the Cap of Darkness."

"There," said Siegfried; "I have learnt

something from the bird. And indeed at this the dying Fafner hinted—gold—gold! And what of this ring and Cap of Darkness? I must e'en go seek them out."

So saying he entered the dragon's den.

No sooner had he disappeared than Alberich crept out of the cleft among the rocks in which he had concealed himself, and Mime came forth from under the bushes, peering about. Satisfied at seeing the carcase of Fafner, he thought that now his opportunity had come to take the hoard to himself, and he was approaching the cavern for that purpose when Alberich stood in his way.

"What!" exclaimed Mime, starting back. "You here, brother? What brings you to this place?"

"The same thing that draws you. We both desire to obtain the hoard over which Fafner has kept guard."

"I come here with a good right. The treasure is mine. It was I who formed the ring and the tarnhelm."

"You—you acted under my orders. It was I who won the Rhine-gold from the Water-sprites, not you."

"I wrought by my skill what was made out of raw metal."

"You worked but as the unintelligent fool, under my direction. The brain owns what the hand makes."

"The treasure of Rhine-gold was taken from you," retorted Mime. "The Frost-giants got possession of it; and then my pupil slew the last of the race—there he lies—and consequently by the right of conquest it is his; and me he will re-

pay with it for the care I have expended on bringing him up."

Alberich laughed aloud. "What, pay to a tender nurse, and a school-teacher, the wealth of gold uncounted, the ring of power, and the cap that can transfigure or make invisible! A goodly payment indeed. But never shall all this be yours."

"Well, come now, brother," said Mime, in a cajoling tone, "let us dispute over it no more. The hoard shall belong to us both, we will equally share it. The ring I will surrender to you, but I will keep the tarnkappe for my portion."

"Never," retorted Alberich. "Vastly cunning you are. You think, if you obtain the Cap of Darkness, that you will become invisible, and rain blows on me, as I did on you afore; aye, and wrapped

in darkness you will find means to filch the ring from me."

"What!" exclaimed Mime, "brother Alberich, do you scheme to deprive me of any share in the spoil?"

"Not a grain of gold dust shall you have, nor lay a finger on the ring or tarnhelm. Now you know my answer."

"So, so! Then I will summon to me Siegfried. He will right me with his strong arm," said Mime.

"There he comes," scoffed Alberich.

"Dazzled with the gold, he has been stuffing his pockets with the ore."

"Not so!" gasped Alberich in dismay. "He has got hold of the Cap of Darkness."

"And the ring!" shrieked Mime.
"Ah, ha! Wait a while, and I shall win both from him."

"You cannot; they shall be mine."

Then Alberich crept back in the cleft among the rocks, and Mime ran off to fetch the poisoned draught he had prepared for Siegfried.

Both had vanished when the young hero issued from the cavern. He looked hard at the ring and the tarnhelm, puzzled to know their use; the ring indeed served as a gay ornament to his finger, but what of the Cap of Darkness? Guided by instinct rather than reason, he had picked these two articles from the store, and left the rest untouched. As he stood meditatively regarding his acquisition, he heard the wood-bird sing, and what it said he could understand.

This is what the bird sang from the linden tree—

"Ha! Siegfried doth hold The ring of Rhine-gold, And the mystical tarncap as well. O trust not to Mime. But give heed to my rhyme, His nature is false as 'tis fell.

If you list to his voice, If you make the wrong choice, And taste of his treacherous horn. Then poison will run Through your veins, and undone You will be-and an object of scorn."

As the bird sang, Siegfried attended to the strange words, and all the while his eve watched the form of Mime creeping up, with a drinking-horn in his hand. Fafner in dying had warned him of treachery in him who had urged him on; and the warning had been repeated and pointed by the bird.

And now a strange thing happened. Siegfried discovered that he could hear the inner voice of the dwarf, as he framed thoughts in his heart, as well as the words he spoke with his lips.

This was due to the dragon's blood that had moistened his lips. Neither this nor the faculty of hearing and understanding the voices of the birds was to last.

It would remain to him only so long as the stain was on his lips and the taste of the blood was in his mouth. Of this he knew nothing. He would discover it later, as these new powers were withdrawn.

And as Mime came on, Siegfried could hear him speak with his heart, and say, "There stands that booby. What led him to choose the ring and the tarnhelm? I wonder if the Wanderer inspired him with the thought, that Wanderer who said that my head was to

be forfeit to the lout. Those who prophesy take vast pains to make their prophecies come true. I shall have to use all my cunning to overreach him."

Then Mime, smirking on Siegfried, said aloud, "Ah, ha! my young hero. So, so! now you have learned what it is to fear?"

"I have not learned fear yet," replied Siegfried.

"What, not from the grimly dragon?"

"No; I feared him not. He deserved his death, for he was a great scoundrel; but I find there are worse scoundrels alive who as richly, or more richly deserve death."

"So!" said Mime to himself, but Siegfried heard every thought framed and unspoken, "So, he has some smack of mistrust. Well, I must cajole him, and set him to drink of this draught, that will lull him to a sleep from which is no awaking. After all, he is easily managed—a wayward boy."

"Mime," said Siegfried, "you plot my death."

"What say you?" asked the astounded dwarf. "I—I—seek to hurt you—I who nursed you as a peevish babe! I who brought you up! Not I—not I."

But in his heart he said, and Siegfried heard it, "I hate these Wolsungs, and this is the last of them. He has not learned fear yet, and so the doom weighs on me, unless I forestall it. The Rhinegold I must and will win as well."

"I care not if you do hate me and all my Wolsung race," spoke Siegfried; and Mime started, to find that his thoughts had been read. The Fight with the Dragon 195

"What!" exclaimed Mime, "I said not that."

"No, but you thought it," replied Siegfried.

"Never, never! I love you, my foundling, my nursling. I have cared for you since you were an infant. And see now, considering how exhausted you must be after your labour, your fight with this horrible dragon, parched with the heat of his breath, I have prepared a refreshing drink for you. I brewed this ale. A fine invigorating liquor of the finest malt. Come, take a good draught and refresh yourself." Then to himself he said: "I shall win to myself all the hoard of Fafner; I shall rob him of his sword, of the ring, and of the tarnhelm-when he has drunk my deadly draught."

It was to Siegfried as though he looked

into the mind of Mime as if it were a running stream and he saw all the pebbles on the floor.

"So," said he, "it is my sword and my spoil of Fafner that you lust after?"

"How you distort my meaning," said Mime; "I think only of your welfare. I brewed this ale only for you. I thought only to refresh you—and you turn all I say contrariwise. Here, drink and be regaled."

"I trust you not, Mime," said Siegfried.
"False you are, and false ever will be."

"Drink, drink; I see your lips are parched."

"Parched — but not for this!" Then Siegfried raised his sword and smote the dwarf and slew him. "Now," said the young hero, "I have rid earth of two foul incumbrances, Fafner and Mime, both false and treacherous. So does straight Truth conquer base Force and subtle Guile."

CHAPTER XI

NEW ASPIRATIONS

It is said in the original story of Siegfried, that after having slain Fafner, hearing the birds say that he who bathed in the blood of the slain monster would be invulnerable, he proceeded at once to immerse himself in the sanguinary flood that poured from the heart of Fafner, and he was therewith drenched, save only in one spot between the shoulder-blades, where a linden leaf fell and rested. But although Wagner, in his opera, has adopted so much of the story as to make his hero invulnerable save between the shoulder-

blades, he has not produced this scene on the stage. Yet we are bound to accept the ancient tradition, as it explains what follows.

Siegfried now took the body of the slain Mime and cast it into the cave. "Go there, wretched dwarf," said he; "it has been after this gold that thou hast lusted and schemed treachery. Therefore take it now and have it as thine own—I want it not."

And then he rolled the huge carcase of the dragon to the mouth of the cavern, and said: "There, Fafner, dead, guard that which in life thou didst lie upon."

The sun was hot, and he was tired with his labours, and he retired under the limetree, and rested there, looking up into the green quivering leaves where the bees hummed and where the thrushes sang"O lime-tree, wet with honey-dew,

Honey-dew, sweet honey-dew,

The honey to thy leaves belonging;

With winged creatures round thee thronging,

To sip thy honey,

The honey-dew

That drips from thee.

The fragrant air is full of song

From flutterers the whole day long,

Because of thee, fair tree,

Blossoming, sunny,

Because of thy honey."

Then the thrush began again to sing.

"Oh, little bird," said he, "that in the leaves dost flirt, with strain so sweet! Already good advice thou gavest me, singing so beautifully in the tree! Rede me some further counsel; tell me why my heart is full of cravings, why! I sigh! I sigh! I sigh! I

Then he understood the song of the bird—

"Ho! Siegfried doth hold
The ring of Rhenish gold
And the tarnhelm as well!
Fafner he overcame,
Nor feared his breath of flame,
Nor the dwarf so foul and fell.

High on the mountain-top,
Circled with flame,
Lieth a maiden fair,
Brunnhilde her name,
High on the mountain-top,
Sleeping in peace,
Waiting from Siegfried
Release."

"What is this thou singest, sweet bird?" asked the young man, starting up. "What be the tidings thou bringest me? My heart swells, strange longings come over me."

Then the bird sang-

"Love be thy bourne,
Life 'twill inspire,
Siegfried to win it
Must traverse the fire.

Love all-entrancing,
Life's truest sun,
Love through hard labour
Only is won."

"What," said Siegfried, "is labour to me? I have slain Fafner, and I count that as naught. Show me some other achievement and I will accomplish it. I slew Fafner for naught save gold, for which I care not. Doubly stout will be my arm if I know that it will win me love. Hitherto I have been alone, have known none to whom I could cling. Mime inspired but disgust; he showed me no tenderness. Father and mother I knew not. Comrade have I had none."

Then the bird sang once more—

"Seest thou the lambent Flickering flame? Cometh the Fearless One Her to reclaim. To waken from slumber To waken to bliss, Freed from enthrallment By one loving kiss."

"Now," said Siegfried, "I would that I knew where is the mountain on which lies the sleeping Brunnhilde. If I feared not the fiery breath of Fafner I shall not fear the encircling flame. To-day I have spent myself in vain slaying a monster. Now I shall spend myself on something more profitable—in winning a fair maid. But who will show me the way?"

Then the thrush rose and fluttered forward.

"Well, pretty bird, be thou my guide," said Siegfried. "Thee will I follow; lead the way."

CHAPTER XII

WOTAN AND ERDA

Wotan was uneasy. He was conscious that the gods were menaced with destruction, that the old order was drawing to the end; but by what means and when he knew not. Accordingly, he resolved on consulting Erda, the primeval spirit, who knew all things, past, present, and future, and by whom he had become the father of Brunnhilde, whom for her rebellion against his will he had bound to sleep, and had surrounded with a ring of lambent flames, lest her sleep should be broken in on by rude audacious beings of earth.

He went to the cave, in the depths of which slept Erda, dreaming visions of what was to be, and he summoned her by powerful runes to rise and confer with him. Standing before the entrance he sang—

"Awake, awake,
Ere morning break!
From sleep arise and prophesy!
With mighty runes
Sung to old tunes
I draw thee, Wotan, I.
Far down in darkness thou hast slept,
And mysteries unfathomed kept,
Sealed up within thy breast.

Awake, awake,
Ere morning break!
I come to rive thy rest.
Respond, thou slumberer, to my call!
For this I left my holy hall!
Thee I summon, thee alone,
Other counsellor have none.
By the runes upon my spear,
By the moonlight white and blear,
Erda, thou all-wise, appear!"

Then slowly from out the cavern came the great Earth Spirit, who holds the destinies of gods and man in her far-seeing mind; she appeared covered with frost sparkles, hair and garment hung with rime. She said—

"I wake, I wake.
Why dost thou break
My sleep, disturb my dream?"

"I have come to seek counsel of thee, thou who in trance seest all that has been since the Frost-giants encircled the earth with bands of ice; who seest all that men do on the face of the world now; who knowest the destiny that shapes the ends of all that live, of the gnomes in the heart of the mountains, of busy men on its surface, of the gods who reign in Walhalla. I come to thee in trouble of mind. A shiver as from the breath of



The Earth Spirit.



Fate has shaken Yggdrasil, and its fruit has been falling. The fountain that flows from its roots is turbid. A frost has fallen on us gods, and has taken the joy out of our lives. What does this portend?"

Then answered Erda—

"Every being must have an end,
All things do deathward trend;
Yggdrasil itself shall fall,
To ruin crash Walhall.
Why dost thou disturb me now?
All things to fate must bow.
The mystic sisters three,
The Norns beneath the tree,
Spin the world's destiny.
Ever beneath the wheel,
Ever nearer doth steal
The end,
To which all things trend."

"Aye, Erda. That is true, but then may one not lay a hand on the wheel of time and stay it in its revolution, or retard it if one may not stop it?"

Erda replied-

"Ask me no more.

To thee I bore
Once a fair maid.
Once I thy spouse,
Now I but drowse
In earth's womb laid.
Dreaming, ever dreaming,
Nothing is—all is seeming;
The earth—it is naught,
Walhall—but a thought.
Question our child.
Everything must pass,
As breath fades on glass.
Question the undefiled."

"What!" exclaimed Wotan; "speak you of Brunnhilde, the Valkyrie? She angered me. She took on her the defence of the Wolsungs against my will, and that of Fricka. But for her interposition the whole Wolsung race would have been exterminated, and then the dreaded end of all things might have been

averted; for well I know this, that it is through that race, not knowing fear, that the Old Order will be brought to destruction. Because of her disobedience I chastised her by condemning her to sleep. Tell me further."

Erda answered-

"Weak am I growing,
Losing all knowing.
Where is the maid,
Our daughter, laid
In slumber bound?
There seek the clue,
That which is due,
There will be found.
Ask me no more,
The rune's force is o'er."

"You have spaed enough," said Wotan angrily; "well, let the wheel turn, and the Norns spin the cord of destiny. If what must be is to befall, I care not. The end of the Old Order will be the birth of the New."

Then Erda vanished, to return to her sleep and dreaming.

But scarce had she disappeared before Siegfried entered.

"My bird guide," said he, "has deserted me. Yet surely hither it winged its way. The mountain then cannot be distant, and I am in a wild and wondrous region. Whom have we here?"

"Boy, stay—whither away?" asked Wotan, coming forward.

"Ha!" exclaimed Siegfried; "this is some dweller in the place. He can tell me the way. Say, Stranger, where is the mountain, on whose summit is a circle of fire, and in the midst of the fire a sleeping woman?"

"What know you of such a mountain? Who set you on such a quest?" asked the Wanderer.

"A bird—a bird of the air gave me the news."

"Pshaw!" scoffed Wotan. "Birds chatter mere folly. Who with wit would believe a bird's tale, even if he understood it? and no man does that."

"But that do I," retorted Siegfried; "for I slew a monstrous dragon, and when I touched, my lips with my blood-stained hand, my ears were opened, and I understood the speech of birds."

"What! you slew Fafner? Who urged you on to that?" asked the Wanderer.

"Mime, the dwarf, who thrust me on to this that I might learn fear."

"And who welded the sword wherewith Fafner fell?"

"That I did myself, as Mime was not able to do so himself."

"But he was a famous smith."

"So he may have been. But he could do nothing with the fragments of Nothung."

The Wanderer laughed. "Assuredly he could not."

"What know you of Nothung and Mime?" asked Siegfried. "However, enough of this. Show me the road to the maiden whom I seek. Do that for me, old fellow, and then go your way."

"Old fellow, do you term me?" said Wotan; "surely youth should respect age."

"Faith! I was brought up by an old dwarf, and he taught me to despise old age, not to respect it. Why," said Siegfried, drawing nearer, "you are a strange wight, with a flapping cap."

"I wear it against the wind."

"And with one eye. In a brawl, I warrant you, you lost the other."

"How I lost my eye is no concern of yours."

"No; right there. I care naught for you or your eye. Show me the way I desire to go. That is all I require of you."

"You do not know me," said the Wanderer, "or you would show reverence to me."

"I want of you but one thing—be speedy—show me the road that leads to the sleeping maid."

"That will I not."

"I know this is the way. My fluttering guide is gone, but it led in this direction."

"The bird fled from my ravens. This way you shall in no wise pass. I ward it."

"What, you would refuse me a passage?"

"Yes, giddy youth. The maiden on the mountain-top is girded about with flame. Look up. You can see even from here the glare of the fire and the red vapours as they roll away. If you venture into that fire, it will consume you."

"I fear it not, old prattler," said Sieg-fried. "Out of my path!"

"You shall not pass," said Wotan; and he stretched his spear forth to bar the road. "Young man, know the might of my weapon. It was on this that Nothung was shivered, and it will be shivered again."

"So! you were my father's foe. I am glad to have encountered you, and here's for your spear."

With the word he swung his sword and smote the shaft asunder.

"The dawn approaches," muttered Wotan; "I cannot prevent thee. My strength is gone."

And he vanished.

Then Siegfried looked up and saw the flicker of the fire that encircled the mountain-top, and glad was his heart.

"Fire! fire! heavenly gleam,
Light my path up by a beam;
All the way before me glows,
Round me golden radiance flows;
Welcome flames—whate'er betide,
Through ye pass I to my bride."

CHAPTER XIII

BRUNNHILDE

SIEGFRIED now plunged through the fire zone. He wore no harness, only the plain kirtle with which he had ever been invested, but at his belt hung the tarnhelm, and in his hand he carried the good sword Nothung. But he had bathed in Fafner's blood, and that had rendered him invulnerable by sword or flame, save only in the one spot between the shoulder-blades, and to this the fire did not reach: he had also his horn.

When he had traversed the belt of flames, these died down, and he found



The finding of Brunnhilde.



himself on a level space where under trees stood a sleeping horse, and on a sort of bier lay a figure in armour, helm on head, and the body covered by a bright shield.

He was vastly surprised. He had supposed there to see a beautiful maiden.

He looked about him, no one else was to be seen. So he stepped up to the couch, and took the shield away from the sleeper.

"Ha!" said he; "a comely face, as far as it can be seen. I must remove the helmet."

This he did, and when it was taken off, masses of shining hair rolled forth, and the whole beautiful face was revealed.

The sleeper remained undisturbed.

"Can there be life here?" asked Siegfried; and he stooped over the slumbering form, and felt the breath play on his cheek.

"I must rid this sleeper of all the harness," said he. "It contracts the breast. Perhaps then an awakening will come."

But the armour of the body was not to be unlaced. Therefore he took Nothung and carefully with it slit the links of the chain mail, and was thus able to remove it. As he did this, he saw before him the whole form in fair womanly garb.

He stood entranced at the sight. Never before had he seen a creature of such loveliness. It transcended his wildest dreams, and a new sensation came over his heart.

"Oh, mother! mother!" he exclaimed;
"wast thou like this?"

He stood with folded hands, in an awe that was new to him.

"This is no man," said he; "who may this be? Is this the Brunnhilde of whom the bird sang? Would I had that pretty warbler by me now that I might inquire. What shall I do to awake her? And yet I fear the light of her eyes, if with the lids closed she exercises so mighty a power over me. What—do I fear? Have I learned fear at last? I, who feared not the dragon, tremble before a woman!"

Then again he stooped over the face of the sleeper.

"What cherry lips! what sweet breath as of violets passes over them! Like a bee, I would sip honey there;" and he kissed her mouth.

Instantly the power to understand the

speech of birds and to read the thoughts of men's hearts was gone from him. By the kiss impressed on the lips of Brunnhilde, that which he had won by tasting the blood of Fafner was lost.

Slowly Brunnhilde opened her eyes, and rose to a sitting posture. She looked around her, still dazed with her long sleep, and burst forth: "O beautiful sun! O lovely light! O broad green earth, and clear blue sky. I am awake—awake, who have slept a dreamless sleep—I know not for what length of time."

Then she was aware of Siegfried standing beside her, and she asked: "Who is this who has roused me from my slumber?"

"It is I, Siegfried, who plunged through the ring of encircling flames to reach thee." "Siegfried!" she repeated. "Oh, how lovely is the world, how welcome its beauty! I thank thee, Siegfried, that thou hast undone the spell that held me so long bound."

"Mother! mother!" cried Siegfried, in a transport of joy. "I thank thee that thou didst give me life to reach this day, and see this glorious vision."

"Thy mother dost thou call on?" asked Brunnhilde. "It was I who protected thy mother. It was I who rescued her from the Hundings, for over her I spread my shield. It would seem as though by a dim prevision I had seen this day, had thought of thee—and for thy sake had succoured her."

"My mother—thou didst guard her from evil. Peradventure she liveth still."

"Not so, Siegfried; she is dead.

Wotan, my father, pursued thy father and all thy kin to blot it off the face of the earth. But I opposed his will, I took thy mother and thee unborn under my care; for thy sake then, have it, if thou wilt, I incurred the wrath of Wotan, my father's ban, when he laid on me the long sleep from which thou hast roused me."

"A strange tale thou tellest," said Siegfried. "How is it that thou, blooming as in eternal youth, canst have been before I was born?"

"Because I am not of the children of men. I am the daughter of Wotan. I am a Valkyrie, of god-like race. Look yonder. There is my dear steed, Grane; that crops the grass now, but has slept the magic sleep with me."

Siegfried felt his pulses throb; he

longed to clasp this beautiful being to his heart, and falteringly, full of fear of repulse, he said to her: "Brunnhilde! I love thee."

"Love!" said she. "You know not what would be the price of love to you and to me—to me. There is my shield, there my helm. I could no more wear them. I should cease to be a Valkyrie, a being of divine race, immortal, ever youthful."

"What of helm and shield?" said Siegfried. "Be mine, and I will defend thee with my good sword. Oh, Brunnhilde! I plunged through the fire for thee, and the fire has kindled in my heart and courses through all my veins. Let me clasp thee to my heart."

"Not so," she said, repulsing him.
"You know not what the end would be.

Were I to become yours—to be united to a mortal, I should become mortal as well. I should be subject to old age and wither to a hideous crone, as the years rolled on and set their mark on me."

"I flout the thought. I would sacrifice all for thee. Wilt thou do nothing for me?"

"Siegfried," said she sorrowfully, "much depends on me. The whole of Walhalla trembles at this moment. If I descend from my divine position to become the mate of man, it is the rift that will rend the whole Order, and all will totter to ruin. I who have rid the winds, can ride them no more. I who have walked in the golden halls of Walhalla, can thread them no more. I who have been accounted the daughter of Wotan, lose my prerogative. Nor is that

all. Dimly, indistinctly, I perceive a sad doom lies before thee. What it is, how it will come about, I know not. Leave me, let me be in peace, and all will be well. Thou wilt love, thou wilt be happy. I shall remain what I have been, I shall recover my father's love, Walhalla will stand."

"I defy fate," said Siegfried, "come what may. I love thee, and will have thee as mine own."

"High-minded, gallant, I know thee to be," said the Valkyrie. "And wilt thou sacrifice all for me? For the love of me rush on possible destruction? For my sake dare the worst that Fate can do? Defy my awful father?"

"I verily believe I have both defied and defeated him already," said Siegfried. "An old Wanderer appeared to me as guardian of this mountain, one who wore a slouched hat and a wide mantle, and had but a single eye. He would bar my way with his spear, and with this sword I shore it in pieces."

"His spear!"

"Aye, his spear that would keep me from thee."

"Then is the power of the gods broken; then is the old order drawing to its end! I care not what now befalls me, Siegfried!"

"My beloved one!"

"I have done with Walhalla, vast and glorious, its stately towers may fall. The Æsir may end their reign in ruin, the runes will fail in their power, the twilight of the gods set in. But this alone remains to me—love—human love—thy love!" And she fell into Siegfried's arms.

CHAPTER XIV

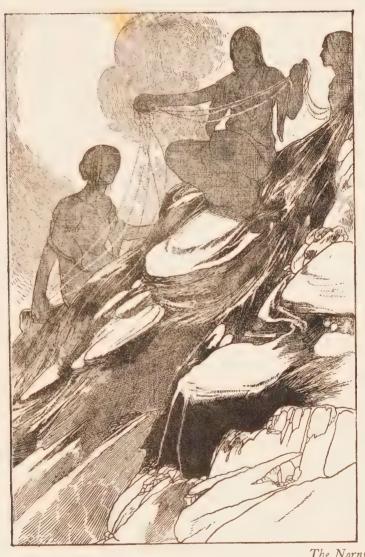
THE NORNS

The three fatal sisters, the Norns, spin the cord of the destiny of gods and men. The time never was when they were not, but they did not begin the spinning till the earth's history began, till the frost-bands were relaxed that bound the world, and life and vegetation began to stir. It is said that there are other Norns, who are lesser, and who spin the thread of the lives of men here below. But the three great Norns concern themselves only with the destiny of the world, and so long as the cord they are engaged upon holds, so long

will the order and fashion of the world last. They sat under a mighty tree near the mountain on which Brunnhilde had slept, and which was girded about with fire.

Besides spinning the destiny of gods and men, the three Norns water the roots of Yggdrasil, the World-Tree, out of the Well of Erda; and the water of that well is so sacred that everything that enters it becomes as white as the film of an eggshell. You may know when any one becomes wan and white that the Norns have been bedewing the thread of that person's life with the water from that fountain. And the reason why dead men's bones are blanched is because over them has been poured water drawn from this same fountain.

There are threads of various sorts that



The Norns.



are used in the making of the cord of the world's history, as in the forming of the threads of each man's life. There are such as are of golden silk, and others as sootblack; there are some that be tough and enduring, and others that be easily broken; there be some hard and heavy as a wire of iron, and others light as a gossamer thread. And the names of the three Norns are Urd, Verdandi, Skuld; that is to say, What was, What is, and What shall be; and all work at the line of Life, into which is woven what is past, together with what is present, and what is future.

The Norns, sitting engaged upon their work, found the threads of the Life of the World running short.

Said one, "Doth the day dawn?"

"It is the fire about Brunnhilde's mountain that flickers still."

"Spin, then, and sing," said the second.

Then the first Norn, whose name was

Urd, began to chant the lay of what had
been—

"Under Yggdrasil, Best of all trees, There is Life's Fountain From which we draw. There also Mimer's well, Wisdom that holds; None may draw from it Save at his risk. Came once the All-father Seeking a draught: Mimer repelled him, Nothing would give. He, he a drink would have, Something must pledge. Saith the All-father then. Surely have I Nothing to pledge to thee Saving an eye. Therefore, my sisters, Wotan goes blind, One eye but seeth, But wisdom he hath.

Then from Yggdrasil,
Mighty World-Tree,
Hewed he a branch to be
Heft to his spear;
On it he graved runes
Potent and fell.
By Wisdom and Power
He ruleth the world."

Then the second Norn took up the strain—

"Turbid and failing I find Erda's Well, Wherewith we water The roots of Life's Tree. Unwatered and sapless The Tree, it will fail, The leaves will be sere, Its apples will fall. Sick has been Yggdrasil Since that the god Rivèd a branch away To serve as his rod. Lo! now a stripling Sunders the spear; Fallen and broken Is now Wotan's power."

Then the third Norn spaed as to what would be—

"Mute in Walhalla The gods sit forlorn, Over them All-father's Ravens still flit. Desolate croaking. Feeling the end Creeping towards them With a sure tread. Branches of Yggdrasil, Rusty and dry, Fall and are gathered, Stacked as to burn. All-father broodeth, With his hacked spear, Knowing that Ragnarök 1 Now draweth near."

And now the first Norn, the Norn of the Past, sang—

"Once was all matter Inert and dead.

¹ Ragnarök is the Twilight of the Gods—the end of all things.

Then came red fire,
With it came life.
Life to the planets,
Life to the sun.
Life unto Yggdrasil,
Life to the world.
Life to the Æsir,
Life unto men.
Life to the Jötuns,
Life to the dwarfs.
Thus out of fire
All living springs,
Fire was the only
Fountain of life."

Then the second Norn, the Norn of the Present, sang—

"Fire the forceful,
Feeder of life,
Feel how the pulses
Throb with its heat.
Fire it is nerveth
Of heroes the arm.
Fire is the element
Of all desire.
Fire—it continues
Humanity's line.

Fire civilizes,
Culture is fire.
When the sun faileth
Everything droops;
When the heat slackens
All things must die.
Fire the forceful,
Fire is life."

Thereupon the third Norn, the Norn of the Future, sang—

"All things in fire
Ending will find.
The sun be consumed,
The moon too expire.
Earth as a furnace
Raging to death,
Yggdrasil blazing,
Turning to coal.
Walhalla kindled,
Totters and falls.
Enveloped in fire
Sit the doomed gods,
Up-shooting flames
Veil them for e'er.

But out of fire

Comes a new birth.

Order regenerate

Newly be framed—"

Suddenly the cord of destiny snapped. The Norns sprang up with a cry.

"Our task is ended," said they. "We must back into silence and nothingness, till the New Order comes in."

CHAPTER XV

THE PARTING

Brunnhilde knew that, now that she had thrown in her lot with the mortals, and vowed to love a man and to be his, her divine powers were leaving her, and she was desirous to impart to him some of the wisdom of the gods.¹

Now the wisdom of the gods was of two kinds, they had rede as counsel, and they had runes. Runes were charms or incantations of great efficacy. So she

¹ A very ancient Norse poem exists, that relates the instruction given by Brunnhilde to Siegfried whilst he dwelt with her on the mountain engirdled with fire.

imparted to him eleven counsels, by means of which, if observed, he could rule his life and pass among men as wise and prudent, and so he might return to her, after a parting, when he had achieved to himself a great name.

She was well aware that she could not detain him for ever on the fire-circled mountain. He was a youth, inexperienced in the world, and he was also one who must win for himself a place in the world's history. He must show himself among men, and show how great and noble a man he was, prudent in council, just in rule, valorous in combat. And all this he well might be, if he observed the regulations for his conduct that she laid down. But, alas! as the sequel proved, he was so maddened with love, so dazzled by her beauty, that he listened to the

music of her voice, and gave little heed to the matter of her discourse. Then she likewise taught him runes of power, runes of victory, to be engraved on the blade and the haft and the guard of his sword; ale-runes, to be spoken over a horn or cup, to guard against poison, and to neutralize its power. Sea-runes, to be cut upon the sides of his ship, and to be engraved on the mast, to secure his vessel from shipwreck. Herb-runes, to be said over medicines concocted from plants, that they might effect healing of wounds. Speech-runes, to recite to prevent his words from giving offence, and to give eloquence when in a great assembly; and, finally, thought-runes, to keep his mind sound and clear in judgment.

And now the time was come when for a while they must be parted. It would be

but for a while, and when he had made himself a mark in the world, he would return for her. He must strive to recover his father's throne, and rule over the people of the Huns. Then he could lead her thither, and drink the bride-ale together at the great wedding feast. So she led him forth to depart.

"Siegfried," said she, "I have imparted to thee what I could. I have given thee divine counsel and strong runes; I have given up for thee my place as a daughter of the gods. Now I am without all-knowledge, only rich in love. My divine strength is fallen away, and all my strength lies now in you."

"Wondrous maid," answered Siegfried, "be not angry if I do not remember all that has been given me. The only knowledge I care for is the knowledge that you

love me. I shall have but one recollection—and that of Brunnhilde."

"Do not forget, Siegfried," said she.
"Men are thoughtless, men are forgetful!
Remember that you passed through the fire to me."

"Yes, to win you as mine for ever."

"Remember how you found me, in my silver armour, helmet on head, covered with my shield, fast asleep."

"And woke you with a kiss."

"Remember the oaths you have made to me. Never, never regret them and break them."

"That I never will, Brunnhilde. Here you shall remain, still encircled with fire. None will o'erleap the flames save I, I only will return through them. Swear that you will only receive him who comes to you through the fire."

"I swear it. Come through the fire—and I am yours."

"And here, my beloved," said Siegfried,
"is a present I make to you in return for
the counsel and runes you have taught
me. Take this ring."

He drew from his finger the fateful ring of the Niebelungen and placed it on her hand.

She looked at it and said: "Siegfried, I make a return to you for this. Take my good horse Grane. Once he bore me through the clouds, and he carried me in the storm wind. But now his powers are reduced, as are mine. Still he is a brave horse, he will carry you through fire and water, and into battle. He will hearken to your lightest word, and needs not spur or lash."

"It is well," said he; "so-I will go

forth wearing your armour, defended by your shield, mounted on your horse, and my heart fired with you."

- "And I-I shall be alone,"
- "For awhile only. Expect my return, riding through the fire on Grane. Farewell!"

"Farewell—and ever again, farewell!"
Then he mounted Grane, and the gallant horse leaped, the flames rose and formed a screen—and Brunnhilde saw him no more.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GIBICHUNGS

It must be related how that when Alberich the gnome had possession of the ring, and therewith all power, he had employed it to draw away to the nether world Grimhild, the lately widowed queen of Gibich, king of the Burgundians, who had his palace on the Rhine at Worms.

The still youthful queen was walking in the rose-garden, when from among the bushes stepped forth the hideous dwarf, and holding forth the ring commanded her to follow him. Unable to cry out or to lift a hand in self-defence, able only to follow, she was led by Alberich to the bank of the stream, and forced to enter a boat. Then he rowed her across, and conducted her to a cave, down which he compelled her to descend with him to the nether world, and there she was constrained to remain with him as his queen over the elves for a year and a day, till the ring was taken from him by Wotan, and his power was broken.

Then only was she able to make her escape. She retraced her steps to the upper world and returned to Worms, where soon after she bore a son, who was named Hagen.

Gunther was then king in his father's room, and he little relished having the half-brother, Hagen, reared in his palace. However, Hagen rapidly grew, and displayed so much ability, was so shrewd



Grimhild in the garden.



in counsel, so handy in executing for Gunther anything he desired, so skilled as a smith, moreover, that little by little he ingratiated himself into the favour of his half-brother. He was not outwardly deformed and hideous like his father, but he had inherited from Alberich his truculent and crafty nature.

Grimhild had died of shame and grief at the birth of this demon child; and all who were of the royal family of the Gibichungs were Gunther and his sister Gudrun.

One day that Gunther and Hagen were walking together by the side of the Rhine, they talked of the Burgundian kingdom, of how it had been founded of old on the river, of its extent, and of the prospect there was of its holding its own among the nations in the future.

"It is a glorious river," said Gunther, "and set in vine-clad banks—good faith, I should not be surprised if you envied me my kingdom,"

"I envy you not," said Hagen; "I am grateful to you for having reared me, and to my mother for having borne me."

"No—let there be no envy between us," said Gunther. "You are of use to me, and I to you. You have your place at my court through my favour, and of your shrewdness in counsel I cannot speak too well."

"If my counsel be of value, I would fain give you some."

"What?-speak out."

"It is this. You, Gunther, have no wife, Gudrun has no husband. How can the stock live if it put forth no leaves?"

"I know no woman my equal in rank

or reputation that I could take," said the king.

"But I do know of one, the loveliest woman in the world, wise and of exalted race—even the race of the gods. She dwells on a mountain height ringed about with fire. He who would win Brunnhilde must win her by passing through the flames."

"That would be beyond my power."

"Perhaps so; but there is one invulnerable to flame who can achieve this."

"Who may that be?"

"Siegfried, the last of the Wolsungs, and he is the man that you should secure for your sister Gudrun."

"What has Siegfried done? I know nothing of him."

"He it was who entered the cave in which is stored the hoard of Rhine-gold,

and it is his. He slew the dragon who defended the treasure, and so won it all to himself."

"I have heard of that Niebelungen hoard."

"There is no store of gold like to it in the world. My father, Alberich the gnome, won it from the Rhine maidens, and he increased it in the heart of the mountains, by making the dwarfs collect more gold from the veins of the earth. He who possesses the store, possesses the world."

"And it belongs to Siegfried now?"

"Aye, and with it all the power and dominion given by untold wealth."

"You say that he alone can brave the circling flame and reach and win Brunn-hilde."

"It is so. No other man can withstand the fire."

Gunther mused, in no good mood. "It seems to me," said he, "that this Siegfried will possess all, gold and power and the fairest woman on earth."

"I do not say that he shall possess her," said Hagen; "I suggest that he should endeavour to win the bride for you."

"For me!" exclaimed Gunther, pacing the ground in agitation; "how could I induce him to do that? I can offer him nothing he has not got already."

"You can—your sister."

"Tush! A fellow like he can look where he will, and will not care for me," said Gudrun, who was present.

Hagen laughed maliciously. "Have you forgotten the draught I compounded?" asked he; "the draught now ready and put aside? Let Siegfried but appear, and

give him to drink of the goblet, then he will fall in love with the first woman his eyes rest upon, and be careful to present Gudrun to him. If he has loved any other before, by the virtue of that draught all recollection of her will be taken clean away."

"You are clever, Hagen!" exclaimed the king. "I have often followed your advice and found it serviceable, but never have I met with such cunning counsel as this."

"I would fain see this Siegfried," said Gudrun.

"Aye—where may he be found?" asked Gunther.

"He cannot be very distant," replied Hagen. "He is not so far distant at this time. He is wandering over the world seeking adventures. Just now he is on his way up the Rhine to the Hunland, to reclaim the inheritance of his fathers, the Wolsungs."

Now it must be explained why Hagen gave this advice to Gunther. He was often visited by his father Alberich, but secretly, in the forest, where none might see. Alberich knew pretty well what had been the course of Siegfried after he had slain Fafner and Mime. From afar off he had tracked him, and he knew that he had passed through the fire to Brunnhilde. And he had formed a scheme for the securing of the ring and the tarnhelm, by getting them from Siegfried by the aid of his son Hagen. And to make Hagen zealous in the cause, he had suggested to him that if they could get Siegfried and Gunther embroiled and compass both their deaths, then Hagen

himself would be able to seize on the throne and become king of the Burgundians.

Siegfried, as Alberich had forewarned his son, was actually on the Rhine and approaching, and in preparation for his coming the dwarf had instructed Hagen how to brew the drink of forgetfulness. But it must be added, that the story is not told ever in the same way. The Norse version has it that Grimhild, the mother of Gudrun and Gunther, was the one who mixed and prepared the treacherous draught, and that she did it out of ambition to obtain Siegfried as her daughter's husband, and with him the Niebelungen hoard which would make the house of the Gibichungs great, and the Burgundians all-powerful among the nations on the Rhine.

But we have taken the other version of the tale as that which fits in with the dramatized form of it as composed by Wagner. Discrepancies in historic relations are unavoidable.

Whilst Hagen, Gunther and Gudrun were talking, the former, whose eye was fixed on the river, uttered an exclamation: "He comes!"

"Who comes?" asked the king.

"I see a boat on the Rhine, being rowed up-stream by lusty arms. A horse is in the boat. None other but the arms that slew Fafner could propel the boat at such a rate against the current."

"He will pass by," said Gunther.

"Pass he shall not," said Hagen, and running to the bank he shouted to Siegfried, and asked whither he was going. "I seek the hospitality of the Gibichungs," replied Siegfried.

"Then go no further. This is Worms, and Gunther the Gibich is here."

"To the Gibichungs come I," said Siegfried, and he turned his boat towards the shore, little wotting that with the stroke of his oar he was turning to perjury, to his undoing, and to his death.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CUP OF OBLIVION

SIEGFRIED drew to the bank of the Rhine and disembarked, and then led up his horse Grane.

"To whom shall I consign my good steed?" asked he.

"Give him to me," said Hagen. "I will take care of him, stall him, and feed him well."

But Grane reared, and snorted, and fire flashed from his eyes. He liked not the hand that was laid on him. Siegfried, however, paid little heed to this.

Gunther received him warmly, and 263

Gudrun looked on and saw the noble youth, so comely, so straight in limb, with fair shining locks, and blue eyes, with bold carriage, well knit in every part, and she loved him.

This was the man who was to be her husband, she thought, and she liked it well. No braver, better man could she wish to have. Had she entertained any scruples at Hagen's suggestion, they vanished now.

"You are welcome here, Siegfried," said Gunther; "Fame has already spoken of you."

"I will either fight you or be friends with you," said the young Wolsung.

"No fighting—let us be friends, and I place myself at your service."

By this time Hagen had returned, having disposed of the horse.

"I place my sword at your service,"

said Siegfried, "it is all that I have. I am alone, without kindred, and without land and wealth."

"But how may this be?" asked Hagen. "Report says that you are master of the Niebelungen hoard."

"I forgot that, so little store do I place on it. I left it where I found it, in the dragon's cave."

"But," pursued Hagen, "did you take nothing from it?"

"Oh, yes! This cap." He pointed to the tarnhelm. "But of what use it is I do not know."

"Useful it may prove," said Hagen, "rare are its virtues. He who dons it can assume any form he wills."

"I am content with mine own."

"And you took nothing else from the hoard?"

"Yes, a ring."

"And the ring—I do not see it on your hand."

"The ring! I gave it away to a fair maid."

"To Brunnhilde," muttered Hagen.

"That helm may be of service—I would even buy it of you," said Gunther. But at that moment Gudrun entered, bearing the horn filled with the decoction made by Hagen that produced oblivion. She bowed towards Siegfried and modestly proffered it.

"Welcome, noble guest," said she; "let the daughter of Gibich offer you this draught."

"I take it gladly from your fair hand," replied Siegfried. Now, unhappily, by the kiss given to Brunnhilde he had lost the faculty of reading the thoughts of men,

acquired by the touch of Fafner's blood. Had he possessed this now, he would have seen that those with whom he spoke meditated treachery. Yet even so, all might have been well, had he recalled the ale-runes in which he had been instructed by Brunnhilde, which had virtue to expel all poisonous and hurtful matter from a cup. A fleeting thought of this instruction passed through his mind, but he could fix on no word of the rune; so, raising the horn, he said—"I drink to Brunnhilde!" and quaffed its contents. Then he looked at Gudrun, who lowered her eyes, conscious of the false part she was playing. At once the medicated draught began to work. The recollection of Brunnhilde was gone from his mind, and his eyes rested with admiration on Gudrun. "Beautiful maiden!" he exclaimed. "Never have I

seen one fairer, one who so kindles fire in my heart. Tell me, Gunther, the name of your sister."

"It is Gudrun."

"Good are the runes that are writ in her eyes, that run from her lips, that are inscribed on her brow," said the young Wolsung; and, seizing her hand, he said, "I offered my service to your brother, and now I offer myself wholly to you. Will you refuse me?"

Then shame mantled her cheek with crimson, she felt that she was unworthy of the young hero, whom she had won by so false a part, and yet she was proud of her love for him. In confusion she withdrew.

"Gunther," said Siegfried, "where is your wife?"

"I have none," replied the king. "But

I have set my mind to win one, but shall need help so to do."

"Count on me," said the Wolsung.

Then said Gunther, "On a mountaintop engirdled with fire-"

"On a mountain-top," mused Siegfried, faint shadows of recollection passing over his brain, "girdled with fire - what further?"

"Reposes a fair maid. He who can pass through the ring of flame-"

"He who can pass through the ring of flame—" mused Siegfried, with a troubled expression. "Go on with your tale."

"He will win Brunnhilde," said Gunther.

For an instant the name seemed to strike him as familiar, and then all recollection, even the faintest, passed wholly away. All was forgotten since he won Fafner's hoard.

"He who would win Brunnhilde must traverse the ring of fire. I am unable to do that; can I reckon upon you?"

"I fear no fire. I am scathless in flame. I will pass through the burning circle, and win the bride for you—only promise me Gudrun as my wife."

"That gladly I promise," said Gunther.

"Then I will bring Brunnhilde to you," was Siegfried's promise.

"But how will you achieve that?"

"By means of the tarnhelm, if it possesses the virtues that it is said belong to it—that this your companion attributed to it. I will go in your form."

"In that case we must take the oath of brotherhood," said the king.

"Be it so-of blood-brotherhood."

Hagen brought forward a drinking horn and filled it with wine. Then, according to ancient usage, each cut his arm and allowed a few drops of his blood to flow into the wine. After which both made oath of perpetual fidelity, the one to the other. "Thus as we mingle our blood, thus do we link our destinies. Each true to the other, as brother to brother—the friend of one, the friend of the other, the foe of one is foe to both. He who fails keeping his oath, let the shame of broken pledges rest on him, let him not prosper on the earth. Let him be despised of all. Here we sweareternal troth!"

Then they clasped hands—"True in the camp, and true in the castle. True in the field, and true in the town. True waking, and true sleeping. True in thought, and

true in deed. True in word, and true in work. True in life, and true to death." Thereupon each drank of the horn, which Hagen then removed from their hands, and going aside hacked it to pieces with his sword.

"Who is this man that stands so near to you, and yet is so different from you?" asked Siegfried.

"He is my half-brother," replied Gunther.

"Wherefore did he not join with us in the blood-bond?"

"I am not one to be so linked," said Hagen. "My blood is not that of the Gibichungs. Though Gunther and I have had but one mother, diverse were our fathers. My blood is too ignoble to be joined with yours, too cold for such hot drops. It would have chilled the potion—

it would have curdled it. No, I am not one to be so linked in Brotherhood bond."

"Let him be," said Gunther; "his mood is strange."

"Now then," urged Siegfried; "now let us start on our venture. Restless am I, and would ever be on the move, ever questing strange adventures. Here is my boat, it shall carry us both to the mountain of which you spoke. One night you shall remain in charge of my skiff, whilst I seek the maiden you desire. The circle of flame shall not stay me. I will rush through the fires and bring her forth to you."

"But, mind you," said Hagen, "she has a ring on her hand, and that ring you must remove. So long as she has that you will not win her. That ring remove, forget not my counsel."

"I shall not forget."

"But," said Gunther, "why not tarry here awhile and let us feast upon our linked brotherhood? Tarry a night and a day, and then let us start on our journey."

"I am all on fire to be off. I look to return speedily, my task accomplished, to earn Gudrun."

"Well, then, so be it," said Gunther.

"Do thou, Hagen, keep guard over my palace and my sister and my realm during my absence."

At this juncture Gudrun appeared. She saw her brother and Siegfried enter the boat, unloose it, and the little skiff dashed down the stream of the Rhine.

"Siegfried!" exclaimed she. "Whither is he gone?"

"He goes but to return to you," replied Hagen. Then, arming himself with spear



The Cup of Oblivion.



and shield, he seated himself before the entrance to the palace.

"So-so!" said he. "Here am I set as guard over the hall of the Gibichungs and the land of the Burgundians-I, the son of Alberich the dwarf Wind and water sweep Gunther away, and the Wolsung holds the rudder. Little do they consider whose will sets them on their course, to accomplish what end they undertake this task. Siegfried will bring his own true bride here to the Rhine, and with her the ring that I covet. So works out the scheme, so will return the ring to my father Alberich who first won it, and so will the way be cleared for me to become king over the Burgundians. So moves the world. The fools are the playthings, the pawns on the board, moved by the wise. Force is naught before wit. Wit wins all."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BETRAYAL

MEANWHILE Brunnhilde sat on the mountain, and round it flickered, now rising, now falling, the belt of flame. Time passed, and no Siegfried returned. She looked at the ring, and that was her one comfort—that and thoughts of him. She had lost the love of All-father Wotan; she had forfeited her place among the gods of Walhalla, her divine powers were crippled. She had surrendered her horse Grane, her shield, and her helm. She was no more a Valkyrie to ride on the winds, to flutter over battle-fields and conduct

the souls of heroes to the presence of Wotan. Her wisdom was gone from her, as was her strength. That power resided in the ring was what she did not know. It was a ring, a pledge of Siegfried's love, of his fidelity—that was all, but that all was everything to her.

She was not yet wholly freed from the doom laid on her by Wotan. Here she must remain girded about with fire, till one came through the flames to carry her away to make her his wife.

Siegfried had indeed pierced the fiery wall; he had roused her from sleep; he had won her love; but he had not carried her away. She knew that he could not do this, as he had no home to which to conduct her. Till he had recovered the throne of Hunland, there was no place to which he might conduct her. But she

relied on his gaining the place that was his due by birth, and till then she must remain patient in endurance, patiently waiting. That any one else should come, that was not to be thought of. Who but he could pass unconsumed through the fire?

As she thus sat one day, she heard a rushing blast, and the well-known sound of a Valkyrie riding on the wind; she looked up, and to her came a sister Valkyrie, Waltraute. Rejoiced to see a face, and that the face of a sister, she sprang from her seat and rushed to her embrace.

But Waltraute was grave, and shrunk slightly from her; her godlike nature recoiled from the touch of one in whom what was human now predominated.

"Oh, Waltraute! dear sister! welcome! Glad am I that you have come to joy me

in my loneliness. But, oh! tell me of my father, tell me of the gods, tell me how fares all in Walhalla! How didst thou dare to visit me? Is the All-father's wrath appeased? Does he remember and long to see his child? Here he chained me in bands of sleep upon this rock, because I crossed his will and extended my protection to the last of the Wolsungs. Here was I to abide till I was awakened by one who would dare to pass through the flames. Here must I abide till he comes to lead me out of this enchanted ring to be his wife and his queen. Oh, sister! I have been so happy in the love of one who did come and who did awake me, and who will bear me away with him. Was it love for me that brought you here? Did Wotan relent? Or have you defied his command?"

- "Brunnhilde, grief and fear hold the gods mute."
- "What say you? Why do they grieve?"
 - "All approaches the end."
 - "The end!"

"Listen to me," said Waltraute; "no more are we Valkyries sent forth to the battle-field. No more are the souls of heroes brought to Walhalla. In the golden mansions there is no revelry, gods and the heroes sit silent and abashed. Wotan is on his high throne, and in his hand he holds his shattered spear, with which he controlled gods and men and elves. Yggdrasil is withering, and its branches fall broken. The apples are shrivelling, the leaves rain down, dead and sear. About Walhalla are heaped the faggots of Yggdrasil's branches. On their

seats sit all the gods and speak no word, for All-father is sunken in despair. The ravens fly over the world and bring back their tidings, but there is no good news in their report. All hastens to its end. We, the Valkyrie, weeping kneel at Wotan's feet, but he smiles not on us, he gives us no tasks to discharge. But once he thought of you, Brunnhilde, and once he spoke. With you the fate of the gods, the lasting of Walhalla, the endurance of the rainbow bridge, rests."

"How can that be? I am an outcast, I am alone, I have forfeited my divine rights. How then can all depend on me?"

"It all depends on the ring."

"The ring-what ring?"

"That ring on your finger. The ring of the gold of Rhine daughters, the Niebelungen Ring."

"This ring-it is mine."

"It is thine now. But restore it. Give it up, and yet all may be well. The curse will be at an end. Yggdrasil will put forth fresh leaves, the fountain of Erda will flow again, the gods will recover freshness and renew their youth on the apples of life; Wotan the All-father will again be mighty, all-powerful over the world."

"The ring! would you have me surrender the ring?"

"That alone can restore the old order, that alone can revive the old world."

"I cannot surrender the ring," said Brunnhilde abruptly.

"But think how much depends thereon. Without that the eternity of the gods fails, and the curse lies on them as on all men."

"I cannot surrender the ring."

"But why retain it—when the gods desire it?"

"The ring—the ring is mine. It is everything to me, the pledge of faith, of love. It is more to me than the lasting of Walhalla. It is more to me than the welfare of the gods. I have set all that behind me, and all my happiness is bound up in the ring."

"Is this the love you have for your sister?"

"Get thee gone. Tempt me no more.

I will not give up the ring."

"Alas! alas!" wailed Waltraute; "then the last hope fails, the last chance is gone. Woe to the gods and woe to us Valkyrie! woe to Walhalla!"

Then mounting her horse she went away in the storm blast.

Brunnhilde remained, wrapped in her meditations. Had she done right? She could not act otherwise. The ring was a sacred pledge—a token of fidelity between herself and Siegfried. No—for nothing could she part with it.

Whilst thus musing, she heard the sound of Siegfried's horn, and her heart bounded with joy. He was returning—returning to her—to take her to him, to his people and his home, henceforth to be her people and her home.

"Oh, Siegfried! Siegfried, come! come! Know what I have endured for you!"

Suddenly she started back—she who had been running forward to meet her beloved; for she saw a stranger approaching through the flames. He wore the tarnkappe on his head, covering the greater part of his face. He did not wear

her helmet, her shield, he was altogether another.

She uttered a piercing cry—"I am betrayed! betrayed!"

But this was indeed Siegfried, only by the potency of the draught brewed by Hagen he had forgotten her, forgotten his oaths, forgotten his adventure in piercing the flames to reach her, forgotten his encounter with the Wanderer, and his smiting asunder the spear that would bar his way, forgotten even the song of the wood-bird.

"Brunnhilde!" said Siegfried, "I come as a wooer. I have traversed the flamewall. I come to claim you as wife, and to carry you away."

"Who are you?" asked she, trembling, "who are you that have dared this?"

"A warrior come for his wife."

"A monster—an eagle come to swoop down on me a helpless prey. Are you a man? or are you a fiend?"

"I am a man, a Gibichung, king of the Burgundians on the Rhine. My name is Gunther. I have come to take you away."

"O Wotan!" said Brunnhilde, "come to my aid! Deliver me from this misery, this shame! I am vowed only to Siegfried, I cannot follow this man."

"Follow me thou shalt. To follow me thou art constrained."

"You dare not approach! Look at this ring! This ring was given me by the greatest of men. This ring bound me to him."

"Then the ring must come off," said Siegfried.

Now had Brunnhilde known that she

had but to turn the ring about three times from left to right on her finger, no power could have withstood her, no magic availed. But she was ignorant of the virtues of the ring, and therefore could not employ them. But indeed the secret of how to call forth the powers of the ring lay only with Alberich the dwarf, and with Wotan the All-father.

"That ring I will have," said Siegfried, and he seized her hand.

"Away! away! thief, robber! The ring is mine. I will not surrender it!"

"Then I will take it by force," said Siegfried.

She writhed and tossed, she broke from him and fled; but he followed her, overmastered her, plucked the golden circlet from her finger, and placed it on his own. "There now, Brunnhilde! Bride of Gunther, now thou art mine."

She sank fainting on a stone and burst into tears.

"Here," said Siegfried to himself, "here must I stay throughout the night; but see, I draw my sword, and the bright steel blade shall be between me and her. True will I be to my blood-brother. The steel shall divide us twain."

CHAPTER XIX

A FATAL ERROR

HAGEN sat sleeping before the palace of the Gibichungs; it was not a full sleep, but one in which he was hovering between waking and dreams. And as he thus sat, his father, Alberich the gnome, came to him.

"Hagen, my son," said he, "do you sleep too sound, or can you hear me?"

"I sleep, but I can hear," replied Hagen.

"The time draws on apace when you must use your keen wit, and have a bold heart to win everything for me and for

yourself. I gave you cunning—your mother courage."

"I hate all who are happy and noble," muttered Hagen, even in half-sleep expressing the thoughts of his heart; "what am I but a cross-breed, half dwalf, half human? I have no place in the world. Every one looks down on the cross-breed."

"Hate the successful and happy, on whom the sun ever shines, to whom all is given. It is out of hate that one gathers force enough to elbow one's way up. Know, son, that the ring is almost within your reach. That ring Wotan took from me; from him, great heavenly booby, it passed to the Frost-giant Fafner; from Fafner the Wolsung won it with his sword, and now the Wolsung stock and all the gods of Walhalla are drawing to a crisis,

and the crisis can be determined by you. Do you sleep, or do you hear me, son of mine?"

"The power—the sovereign power!" murmured Hagen.

"That power will fall into our hands. We alone know how to use it. That clumsy fool Fafner could guard but could not exercise it. The blustering Siegfried could win it, but knew not how to use it. Fafner has fallen, Wotan with his broken spear is helpless, the ring that can command the world is now possessed once more by Siegfried, and from him it must be riven. He the subduer of the dragon, he the smiter in sunder of Wotan's spear, he must be overmastered by us, wit must win. Will you bestir yourself, my son, and effect his destruction?"

"I hate him-I will destroy him."

"There is danger to be guarded against; if in a fit of folly—if persuaded by the woman he loves to cast the ring into the Rhine, it is lost to us for ever. Therefore I urge you, my son, therefore I bid you swear to me to effect his death—and to win me the ring."

"Aye, aye, I will swear," muttered Hagen, and Alberich vanished with a final caution to be crafty and true.

Hagen, dazed with sleep, not knowing whether he had actually conversed with Alberich, or whether what had passed had been a dream, opened his eyes, and saw that the sun was rising and sparkling in the waters of the Rhine.

He continued for some time inert, brooding over his schemes, when he was startled by a shout, and looking up saw Siegfried come, at first with the tarnhelm on, which, however, he plucked off and stuck in his girdle.

"What, Hagen! sleeping when the day is bright?"

"You here, Siegfried! I supposed you were far away. Whence come you now?"

"From the fire-ringed mountain. They are following, the loving pair, slower than I came, in the boat."

"So you overmastered the fire and won Brunnhilde?"

"I did. Where is Gudrun? is she up?"

"Halloo! Gudrun!" shouted Hagen;
"come forth, Siegfried is here."

"I will tell you the story when she arrives."

A moment after Gudrun stepped from the hall and welcomed Siegfried with undisguised joy.

- "I have come back full speed to you," said Siegfried.
- "But where are Brunnhilde and my brother?"
 - "They are on the way."
 - "Was he not scorched by the flames?"
- "He did not venture into them. I passed through that I might win you."
 - "But-you won Brunnhilde."
 - "No; not for myself, but for Gunther."
 - "How contrived you that?"
- "I assumed the tarnhelm, and was transformed into his likeness. I resembled him to a hair. I have to thank Hagen for instructing me in the virtues of that hood."
- "And by this means you won the woman?"
- "She was won for Gunther; but I passed for him."

- "And she lay at your side."
- "It was so; but the sword was drawn, and divided us."
- "How did you effect the change when you brought her to my brother?" asked Gudrun.

"I bore her through the flickering fire, and without was thick mist covering the mountains and filling the valley; through this mist I led her, till we reached the boat and Gunther, and then I vanished and he was left. I came on before by the aid of my tarnhelm, and they follow, a strong wind filling the sail. I have come to bid you prepare for their arrival—prepare for the double wedding-feast."

Then Hagen, who had mounted a hillock, called out, "I see the sail—they come, they come!"

"Quick!" said Gudrun; "Hagen, summon the men to the marriage in the hall of Gibich. I will haste to the women and prepare for the banquet."

Hagen ran for the great horn of the urochs, blasts on which summoned the Burgundians on every great occasion to hasten to Worms, to surround their king. Usually it was only sounded when there was danger apprehended of a foreign incursion. Hagen now blew the call to arms, and shouted, "Ho! ho! ye men of Gibich, arise! Gird you with your swords, don your coats of mail; to arms! to arms! Ho! ho! Come! come!"

The blast was responded to throughout the land by the watchmen in every village. On all sides might be heard the braying of horns; from all quarters men gathered and came fully harnessed—first those of Worms itself, and then those from the immediate neighbourhood, followed later by such as came from a greater distance. All had armed, some with swords and pikes, some with clubs and such rude weapons as they could snatch up.

As they streamed into the open place before the palace, they asked why the horn was blown? what was the menacing danger? who were the enemy? from which quarter did they come?

Hagen answered them: "There is no foe. Gunther, the king, is on his way home, bringing a wife with him."

"What! what, no fighting? Why our arms?"

"To receive him with honour, and to welcome his bride."

- "But he has carried her off?"
- "Yes, he has done that."

- "And her kinsmen are in pursuit?"
- "No such thing."
- "Has there been no fighting?"
- "He who slew the dragon has been his succour; and now, men, prepare for the arrival of your king. Slay oxen in sacrifice here to Wotan before his image, and wash his face with their blood."
 - "And what next?"
- "Then must a boar be slaughtered as an oblation to Froh, and a goat to Donnar, and sheep to Fricka, to Fricka the goddess of marriage, that she may bless the bride."
 - "We will do so. What next?"
- "Then fill the horn and the beaker with ale and mead and wine, and drink, men, drink the health of bride and bridegroom."
 - "We will drink surely enough."
 - "Aye, drink, drink-till drunk," said

Hagen, laughing sarcastically. "Naught pleases the gods of Walhalla, who spend their nights in drinking, as does a right drunken bout here below."

"We will pleasure them, never question that," laughed the men.

"Now then—to your ranks, and all in order. Here comes your queen! Swear, should harm befall her, surely to avenge her."

Gunther and Brunnhilde had now arrived, and the king helped her from the boat. Thereupon the men clashed their shields and cheered.

"Brunnhilde," said Gunther, leading forward the Valkyrie, "welcome to the Burgundian land. A proud man am I this day to bring home to my palace and to my people the fairest and the noblest woman on earth. To you they look, do

my people, for through you the race of the Gibichungs shall bloom out and continue."

Again the men cheered and clashed their shields.

Then from the palace came forth Siegfried and Gudrun.

Gunther went forward: "Brave Sieg-fried, good sister, I rejoice to see you again. I rejoice to greet you standing side by side—a happy pair—as we, Brunnhilde and I, are also a happy pair."

Brunnhilde, who had come forward with Gunther, started back and turned deadly pale. Before her stood the man who had exchanged with her vows of eternal fidelity, and who was there now with another woman at his side. But he was wholly unconscious of what passed through her mind. The drink of oblivion had taken from him all recollection of that episode.

"Why, Brunnhilde," said he, "what ails you?"

"Siegfried here," gasped the miserable woman, "and Gudrun?"

"It is so, Brunnhilde. This is Gunther's gentle sister, who will be wed to me at the same time as you to Gunther."

"I—to Gunther!" gasped she. "You lie." She reeled, and would have fallen to the ground had not Siegfried sprung to her assistance and held her up.

Then she said to him in a whisper, "Siegfried, do you not know me?"

"Know you? How should I? Gunther, your wife is ill; come to her aid." As he so said he stretched out his hand to the king, and on his finger gleamed the ring of the Niebelungen, and Brunn-

hilde saw it. Shaking herself free from him, in wildest excitement, she said, "The ring—the ring on his hand—on that of Siegfried—my ring."

The people who had crowded about muttered in amazement at this extraordinary scene.

Hagen, slipping behind the men, whispered to them, "Listen! there is something evil! something hidden that must come to light."

Brunnhilde, with difficulty restraining herself, with eyes flashing, and with vehement gestures, addressed Siegfried: "The ring! That is my ring which I saw on thy hand. It is not thine." She turned abruptly on Gunther. "You it was, you who plucked that ring from my finger." Then back to Siegfried, with ever-increasing agitation, and in hoarse

tones: "Answer me—how came you by the ring?"

"I did not take the ring from him," said Siegfried, disconcerted.

She turned on Gunther: "Answer me! Did you not pluck that ring from my finger when you sought me as your bride? Tell him that—tell him that it was mine, and from me you had it. Bid him restore the ring."

Gunther in great perplexity said: "I did not give him the ring."

"Then how comes he by it, when you wrenched it from my finger? I denounce you, Siegfried, as a thief; you stole it from him when he slept."

Siegfried remained silent awhile; for a moment a dim gleam of recollection returned to him, only at once to be swept away. He was confounded. What

could he say? He stammered, "I—got the ring. I got it from no woman. I won it by fighting and slaying the dragon Fafner."

Then Hagen stepped between and, addressing the injured and furious woman, said: "Brunnhilde, are you quite sure that you know the ring? If so, and it be the ring that Gunther had off your finger, then be sure there has been some cruel deception practised on you."

Brunnhilde, in a storm of passion and grief, cried out: "Deceived! deceived have I been! Shamefully deceived."

"Deceived!" exclaimed Gudrun; and the mob asked, "Say, who was the deceiver?"

"Holy gods!" cried Brunnhilde; "avengers of all wrong, why have I been tortured as has been no other?

Why am I, blameless, to be thus betrayed—cast among fraud and treachery? Oh, ye gods! ye gods! among whom once I walked, is this the way ye chastise me because I left your assembly? Wotan, All-father, avenge my wrong; avenge the deception practised on me!"

"Brunnhilde," said Gunther, "calm thyself."

"How can I be calm? Away from me, you betrayers! Know, all men—all—all who now hear me, that I am not the bride of this man, this Gunther. I belong to him!" and she pointed to Siegfried.

"What, Siegfried, the husband of Gudrun!" exclaimed some of the people.

"He—he alone has my heart! he alone won me, and to him alone did I give myself up."

"Silence, woman!" said Siegfried.
"Your madness will work evil. I know you not. It is true that I won you, but not for myself, but for Gunther. True blood-brotherhood have I not broken. I swear it on my sword."

"Your sword!" scoffed the infuriated Brunnhilde. "I value no oath, no word of yours. You who swear one day what another day you forswear. Your sword is as false as yourself."

Blinded by her passion, knowing nothing of the spell of the magic drink that had driven remembrance of her from him, not seeing that Siegfried had unconsciously deceived her, all her powers of soul were concentrated in desire for revenge.

Gunther was perplexed and downcast. He felt himself disgraced, he mistrusted Siegfried, for he knew nothing of Siegfried's former alliance with Brunnhilde. Thus, what she spoke of he referred to the late occasion when Siegfried had traversed the fire and gained Brunnhilde for him.

Then said the king, "Swear, Siegfried, that she lies."

"Yes," said Gudrun, "swear that thou hast not been false, that the charge is untrue."

And the crowd took the matter up, and declared that an oath of innocence must be exacted of Siegfried before either of the two marriages or both could be celebrated.

"I will swear that I am innocent," said Siegfried.

"Here," said Hagen, stepping forward, "swear on my spear-head."

"Be it so," said Siegfried; he laid two fingers of his right hand on the point. "Glittering spear! hallowed blade! So help me my solemn oath. By the point of this spear I swear that the maid Brunnhilde is stainless, untouched by me. I never saw her, save only when I won her for Gunther, and then I was to her as brother to sister. I kept the blood-brotherhood sacred. I swear that I never loved her, never approached her, never kissed her, never clasped her in my arms. If I swear false, then may this steel strike me, may it pierce me. When my death hour comes, O spear-head, do thou deal me the death wound"

"Let me through," exclaimed Brunnhilde; "I also will swear." She laid her two fingers on the point, and said, "Glittering spear! hallowed blade! So help me my solemn oath. By the point of the spear I speak. On it I lay my grief. May it avenge my wrong. Its strength I dedicate to his undoing. I hallow the point that it pierce his heart; if, as I swear it be, his oath is false that he has now sworn."

"Gunther," said Siegfried, "remove this woman, who pours forth curses and lies. She is ill, she is beside herself. Let her have rest, that this mad fury may subside, and she come to a sound mind." Then in a low tone to Gunther, he added, "It was an ill deed, my winning her in your form by the aid of this tarnhelm; but never fear. This mad delusion will pass, and she will thank you for what you have done."

Turning to the crowd, he said, "Come,

come, my valiants! Come to the table, to drink and to eat and to be merry; and you, fair ladies, lend us your aid. Away with crazy fancies, we will drink and be merry."

CHAPTER XX

A FURTHER BETRAYAL

Brunnhilde, Gunther, and Hagen remained behind. Siegfried, thoughtless, and desirous of drawing off attention from the strained situation, had invited all to go within to drink and forget in their cups what had happened. He thought that Brunnhilde was deranged. In no other way could he account for her persistent charge against him of being her true and real husband. Forgetfulness was still on him. The poison of Hagen's draught still worked in his veins and in his brain.

Thoughtless, relying on his youth, buoy-

ant in his spirits, he presumed that he could thrust his way through the world with his sword, and with the honesty of his purpose. He had taken no heed to the lessons taught him by Brunnhilde, they had gone in at one ear and out at the other. The runes she had recited to him had all been forgotten, the counsels she had given had all been disregarded, and, little as he then supposed, this would lead to his destruction. The only thought that occupied his mind was to draw away the rabble from the scene of altercation, and stupefy their minds with drink, so that they might forget what they had heard, and deem what had passed but as a dream over their cups. Further, he was impatient to have Gudrun as his own, and he therefore hurried on the wedding banquet. For, in the old Germanic and Norse heathen world, the

drinking of the bridal feast sealed the union.

But without stood Brunnhilde, stern, a storm raging in her breast. She knew that some weird mystery involved her. The truth she did not know. She had loved Siegfried, for him she had sacrificed all—her divine nature, her place among the gods, the love of her father Wotan, association with her sisters-more, her divine knowledge and powers. She had sunk for his sake from being one of the goddesses to being merely human, subject to all the infirmities, to old age, to deathand all for Siegfried-and now by some horrible treachery, the nature of which she ill comprehended, she had been betrayed-betrayed by the very man in whom she had trusted, to whom she had sacrificed all-to whom she was bound by the most sacred covenant. He had not only forsaken her, but he had by a mean subterfuge passed her on to another, that he might be free to marry another woman. She was slighted, dishonoured, made a plaything of, despised. Her whole nature rebelled. She would not suffer Gudrun to triumph in having won Siegfried from her. She could not forgive this Wolsung for his treachery to herself.

What! for this had she defied Wotan, her father, and had befriended the Wolsungs? For this had she been doomed to the long sleep on the mountain-top? For this had she broken away from the divine race of the Æsir? For this was she condemning all Walhalla to ruin? What was the true significance and virtue of the ring she knew not. But that

on it depended the gods—that she had learned from the Valkyrie Waltraute. And she had refused to give up the ring that might have saved the gods from destruction for the love she bore to this Siegfried, this perjured man, who flouted her for the sake of Gudrun!

"What infernal craft has worked?" she cried. "What magic mystery envelops me? Where are now my old wisdom, my pre-knowledge, my counsel, my runes? To him I committed them all. What has that which I taught him profited him? He is false—false at heart. Oh that I had some of that wisdom I gave away, so that I might unravel this riddle."

Then Hagen stole up to her, and said persuasively: "Trust me, poor deluded, betrayed, rejected woman. Rely on me to avenge the insult offered to you."

- "On whom?"
- "On Siegfried, who has betrayed you."
- "On Siegfried! You? What are you?"
- "I am but the hand that will subserve your revenge."
- "You!" exclaimed Brunnhilde scornfully. "One flash of his eye would wither you. A clutch of his hand would crush every bone in you."
- "That may be, lady; but my spear point is sharp, and where there is perjury, there it will bite."
- "Pshaw! I must have one stronger than you to redress my wrong."
- "I know well enough," said Hagen submissively, "that Siegfried is stronger than I. But good counsel and wit will work the spear and effect the revenge."
 - "Alas! alas! I have lost all my know-

ledge. You—such as you can never meet Siegfried, the invulnerable."

"Invulnerable, is he?"

"Aye," replied Brunnhilde; "invulnerable. Know you not that he bathed in Fafner's blood, and that this rendered him so that no flame could scorch, no blade bite?"

"Altogether invulnerable!" exclaimed Hagen meditatively.

"Not altogether," said Brunnhilde; "as he bathed a lime leaf fell between his shoulder-blades—this he confided to me—and there only can weapon wound. But Siegfried never turned his back to the foe."

"Nevertheless, the foe may get at his back," said Hagen, with an evil chuckle.

Then he turned to where Gunther was standing, depressed and ashamed. "Come,"

said he, "Gibichung, come to your stately wife. Why stand you there moping?"

"I am disgraced, I am dishonoured," said Gunther. "Woe is me, to what have I fallen?"

"You coward," sneered Brunnhilde, "sneaking at the back of a brave man, doing by his arm what your own was too feeble to effect. I did think the Gibichungs were a mighty race, and lo! it has fallen to be represented by such as you."

"There has been treachery throughout," said Gunther; "I acted a false part, and falseness has been dealt out to me. I a betrayer—I the betrayed. My marrow is congealed, my heart is humbled, my brow is shamed. O Hagen, help me to look up! Help me for your mother's sake—the sake of our common mother!"

- "I can help, but in one way alone."
- "And that?"
- "By Siegfried's death."
- "By Siegfried's death!" exclaimed Gunther. "I entered into blood-brotherhood with him. That may not be."
- "Blood-brotherhood!" scoffed Hagen.
 "Much he thought of that when he had
 Brunnhilde in his arms."
 - "Has he broken the bond?"
 - "Broken it to shivers."
- "Betrayed you, has he?" broke in Brunnhilde, "and me has he betrayed as well. False, false, false! Only his blood can make undone what has been done, can avenge the injury inflicted by him on us both. Let him perish, let his life atone for the past."
- "Perish he must," said Hagen. "After what has passed, after that public scandal,

nothing else will avail, and then the ring——"

"Ah, Brunnhilde's ring."

"The Niebelungen Ring," said Hagen.
"That can never be got from his finger so long as he lives. That ring must be restored, or your honour is besmirched."

"Yet—I owe much to Siegfried," said the king.

"Shame," said Hagen. "That is what you owe."

"But Gudrun, my sister, what will she say, what feel?"

"Gudrun!" exclaimed Brunnhilde, flaming up. "She has been the enchantment that has drawn Siegfried from me. Let her feel, let her sink, let her weep. I will laugh."

"Conceal from Gudrun that we have schemed his death, then she will not resent it. Let it take place in the chase. Order a great hunt for the morrow. Let the horns sound and the hounds be loosed. Leave the rest to me."

"If it must be-I agree," said Gunther.

"Siegfried must perish," said Brunnhilde bitterly. "So only can I be satisfied. So only can I repay him his perjury. So only revenge me on Gudrun."

"I thank you, lady," sneered Hagen, "for that hint about the linden leaf. Without that I could have done nothing."

CHAPTER XXI

THE END OF SIEGFRIED

A GREAT hunting expedition was ordered for the morrow. Hounds and horses were ready, and Gunther, Hagen, Siegfried and many others, who had revelled at the table during the night, were ready for the chase.

During the day Siegfried got separated from his companions, pursuing a bear that had taken refuge on the Rhine, in one of the caves or in the deep coppices that rolled down the mountain gullies to the river bank.

To this bank he pursued it, and there lost all trace of it; but came on the Rhine 324

Maidens, daughters of that ancient stream, disporting themselves on the waves, and singing of the lost gold, and their hopes that it might be restored in time to them.

They at once called to him. They saw the ring gleaming on his finger, and hoped to cajole him out of it.

"Ye maidens!" said the Wolsung, "who play in the green waters, tell me, have you allured to you the bear I have been pursuing? Is he your pet? A rough and rude pet he must prove."

The maidens laughed. "If we give the bear up to you, if we tell you where he lurks, what will be our reward?"

"Naught have I to give," replied Siegfried. "I have hunted all day and have killed nothing."

"You have a ring on your hand—give that."

"I won that ring from a dragon in hard fight. Shall I throw that away for a grisly bear?"

"How niggard you are!" mocked the water-nymph. "To ladies, a man should be freehanded."

"I cannot surrender it. What would my wife say?"

"Oh ho! Tied to a woman's apron string. Afraid of her jealousy. Crouching, wincing before her tongue!"

"Mock at me as you list, I will not give up the ring to you."

Then the maidens dived, and Siegfried descended to the river brink. "After all," said he, "one might humour these fantastic damsels. It is but a ring."

All at once they reappeared, but not in mockery, but in a threatening mood.

"Siegfried!" they cried, "beware how

you retain the ring. A curse lies on it, a curse that brings all to destruction who wear it. Give us the ring, and the curse no longer will rest on you."

"Now, ye daughters of an ancient stream, ye talk more reasonable stuff," he answered derisively.

"Siegfried! Siegfried! put not our warning from you. If you keep the ring made out of the gold of the Rhine, which was treacherously taken from us, it will bring on you a fate as tragic as that which befell Fafner who held it. Give us the ring, we will sink it in the depths of the river, and then you will no more have a dark fate hovering over you; the sky will clear."

"Ye crafty wenches," jeered Siegfried;

"ye think to win from me by rousing my
fear what ye could not gain by flattery
and jest."

"Siegfried! Siegfried! there still is time, seize it whilst you may. Rid you of the accursed ring."

"My sword slew the dragon, and cut through the Wanderer's spear. Shall it not avail me further? It is a good sword, and has served me well; I would fain try it further. Let danger draw near! Let foes assail! I fear not. I shall be ready with my good blade to defend myself. If fate be against me—" He stooped and plucked up a piece of turf. "Man can die but once, and I value my life no more than this!" and he cast the sod from him.

At that moment hunting horns were heard, and the Daughters of the Rhine dived and disappeared. Siegfried sounded his horn, and the hunting party arrived on the spot.

"Well," exclaimed Hagen, "we have

lighted on you at last. What took you from our company?"

"I strayed. Came here; the place is fresh and pleasant."

"Aye, here we will have our meal," said Hagen; and the attendants proceeded to bring forth drink and food, and prepare for the much-needed repast.

All now cast themselves on the grass, ate and drank.

"Well, Siegfried," said Hagen, "what have you killed?"

"Nothing. I have met with poor luck. The bear I pursued escaped me."

"What-got nothing?"

"No wild beasts. But I came on a covey of water-fowl. I wish I had captured them, and brought them before you. They sang sweetly, and would have provided good entertainment."

Gunther meanwhile was uneasy. He was well aware that the death of Siegfried was contemplated, but he had entered half-heartedly into the plot. He looked at Hagen with a clouded brow.

"Lucky for you," mocked Hagen, "if the hunter escapes scot-free, and is not himself made the booty."

"I am thirsty," said Siegfried; "pass me the mead."

A horn was passed to him.

"Gunther! blood-brother," said he, "the horn does not brim, pour me in some from your own, that I may drink of what is thine as well as mine, in token of our fellowship."

"What is that I have heard?" asked Hagen. "Is it but an old wives' tale? It has been told that you understand the song of birds." "Since I have heard the voices of women, I have had no ear for those of birds."

"But you did understand them at one time."

"Aye, I did. I will tell you how; but here, first to thee, Gunther. I drink to thee!"

"Now for thy tale," said Hagen.

As all lay on the grass, Gunther with his eyes wandering restlessly from Hagen to Siegfried, and then lowered to the soil, "My tale is a strange one," said the Wolsung. "It is true, I was brought up in the cave of Mime, a dwarf, a notable smith, and with him I learnt to swing the hammer. I was given the fragments of my father's sword, Nothung, and that I smelted and worked at on the anvil till I had fashioned the sword anew. Now there

was on the confines of the forest a monstrous dragon, Fafner his name, and with this sword I fought and slew him. Now listen to what is most strange of all. The blood of the dragon ran over my hand, and burnt it, and I put my smarting, scalded fingers to my mouth. Thereupon I heard the birds sing, and I found that I could understand their speech, and one of them told me that in the cave of the dragon was heaped up a store of gold, and with it a ring and the tarnhelm."

"And ring and tarnhelm you took away?" said Hagen.

"What further did the bird say?" asked some of the hunters.

"Yes, I carried off ring and helm. Then I heard the bird again sing, and it bade me beware of the craft of Mime who had fostered me, for Mime sought my destruction."

" How so?"

"By offering me a poisoned draught; and when he came to me with the offer, I laid him dead at my feet with one stroke of Nothung."

"It served him right," said Hagen, laughing; then he leaned over and, unobserved by Siegfried, squeezed into the horn the juice of the Herb of Remembrance.

Siegfried took a draught and continued: "Then lying under the linden, I heard the bird sing and tell me that on a mountaintop entranced lay a beautiful maid, girded about with flames—her must I win."

He put his hand to his head, he brushed with it his eyes, recollection had returned. All that had been forgotten now stood out clearly before his mind's eye. "Brunnhilde was her name."

"And you followed the counsel of the bird?" asked Hagen.

"I did even so. I sought my way to the mountain, I saw the ring of fire, I passed athwart it. There I found the beautiful one, with helm on head, and a shield over her; I stooped, I kissed her, I woke and clasped her in my arms as my own—my very own."

"What is this that I hear?" gasped Gunther. Now all the mystery was clearing. He saw now that Siegfried had denied this, only because reft of memory through the fatal draught administered to him, with his consent, by Gudrun, mixed, with his knowledge, by Hagen. Siegfried had been true to him after having sworn blood-brotherhood. Brunnhilde had de-

clared the truth about their relations, but these had belonged to this earlier period.

He raised his hand to warn Hagen to proceed no further with the wicked plot. Hagen saw it, and shouted, as some ravens flew out of a bush: "Hah! Siegfried, what do those birds say in their croaking?"

The Wolsung turned his head and back to look after the ravens, and at the same moment Hagen drove the spear into his back between the shoulder blades, where alone he was vulnerable.

"Hagen! what do you?" shouted Gunther, and the huntsmen started to their feet.

"I avenge a false oath," said he.

Siegfried, wounded to death, smote at him, but failed. Hagen laughed maliciously, and walked away. Gunther and the huntsmen were too staggered at what had been done to think of arresting him.

Then Siegfried rose on one arm, and with his dying voice called on Brunnhilde, whom now he well remembered.

"Oh, Brunnhilde! Brunnhilde, my own true bride! Wake and open thine eyes! Who closed them again in sleep? Brunnhilde! Brunnhilde! through the fire I came! I saw thee! I loved thee! I kissed thee! Thou—and thou only art mine, Brunnhilde!" He sank on the grass. "To thee my last farewell."

Thus died Siegfried, the victim of a plot contrived by Hagen, who would now have come to his side and wrenched off the ring had he dared, but that he feared the wrath of the deceived Gunther and the fury of the hunters.

Then, sorrowfully, the men raised the corpse on a shield, and bore it away from the Rhine bank, singing a doleful dirge.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF ALL

NIGHT had come on, and Gudrun at home in the palace at Worms was becoming uneasy. Why were the hunters so late? Did she hear Siegfried's distant horn? What meant Brunnhilde by her laughter, as she went by? Where was Brunnhilde now? Was that she pacing in the distance beside the Rhine? She would see. She went to Brunnhilde's door and called her, but received no answer. That must be she, gloomy, striding by the river's brink. Hark! She heard a voice—it was that of Hagen, calling "Ho! ho!

wake up! Bring forth lights. We are bearing home rich game!"

Then stepping in before Gudrun, he said, with a mocking laugh, "Up and be stirring to welcome Siegfried; the strong man, the invulnerable one is returning."

As the attendants entered, bringing torches and tapers, the procession of the hunters came in sight, bearing the corpse of the murdered man.

"What is this?" asked Gudrun, bewildered; "he has not sounded his horn."

"That will he never do again! His breast will no more draw breath, his lips never again close on the mouthpiece of the horn. No more will he rush forth in battle, never again go to the chase, never court fair ladies."

"What-what are they bringing here?"



The End of All.



asked Gudrun, too alarmed to follow his words.

"A rare spoil—Siegfried, gored to death by a wild boar."

She uttered a piercing cry as she saw the corpse of Siegfried laid before her in the midst of the hall.

Gunther stepped between her and it. "My sister, my dear sister!" said he, as he caught her fainting in his arms.

As she came to herself she cried, "Siegfried! Siegfried murdered!" Then wrenching herself away from Gunther, and repelling him, she cried, "Faithless brother! it is you—you who have killed my husband! Help! help! ye men, draw your swords, and avenge me on the murderer!"

Then said Gunther, "Gudrun, do not accuse me. Yonder stands the murderer,

Hagen. His spear it was that pierced Siegfried. He was the wild beast who rent him."

"Pshaw!" scoffed Hagen. "Cast all the blame on me. You were as guilty as I."

"Cursed plotter!" exclaimed Gunther, "it was your false tongue, your evil suggestions which poisoned my soul."

"Well then," said Hagen, "let it be so. I have killed him, I. It was on my spear-head he swore, and he swore false. If it had not been so, my spear would not have cut into him. He himself was to blame. Perjury must be punished, but blame not the executioner of justice. Come — I claim my due. The executioner's due—the ring."

He stepped towards the corpse. Gunther stood in his way.

"You shall not touch him, or the blood will gush forth and denounce you. You shall not have the ring—you shall have naught but my resentment."

"The ring is mine," shouted Hagen.
"Whoever heard of the executioner not receiving his fee? And the fee of the executioner has ever been the spoils of him whom he has done to death. I demand the ring as my right."

"You shall not have it," said Gunther, drawing his sword.

"I shall take it. I claim my right!" exclaimed Hagen, and he smote at Gunther. The men present rushed to separate them, but it was too late, Gunther had received a mortal blow.

"Now!" cried Hagen exultingly,
"the ring is mine!"

He stretched out his hand to pluck it

from the dead man's finger, when the corpse slowly raised its hand, warned him off, and clenched the fingers; at the same moment the blood welled from the wound.

All recoiled. It is known that at the touch of the murderer blood flows from his victim.

At the same moment Brunnhilde entered, stern and cold. "Cease your clamour!" said she in a hard voice. "What is this wailing? Are ye babes sobbing and screaming for a mother? I am his true wife, I alone can bewail him worthily."

"Brunnhilde!" cried Gudrun, "cursed woman! the cause of all our woes. It was you, you above all, who goaded Hagen and my brother to this hateful crime."

"Silence, wretched fool!" answered Brunnhilde contemptuously; "you never were his wife—nothing but a concubine. I—I only—I—I alone am his wife. To me he swore eternal fidelity ere ever he saw your face."

Gudrun in madness of grief and distress turned on Hagen.

"You it was, you hateful son of a gnome, who brought about all this evil. It was you who mixed the potion of oblivion. It was you who counselled that it should be given to Siegfried. That ever he had been bound to Brunnhilde I never knew. I offered him the potion, but I was not aware of what I did. If to Brunnhilde he belonged, I knew it not, I am guiltless."

She turned away, and threw herself sobbing on the body of her brother.

Hagen made another attempt to burst through the throng and obtain the ring from the dead man's hand; but now Brunnhilde confronted him.

"There is his ring," she said. "With that we sealed our union. The ring he gave to me. On my finger it was as pledge of his love, as token of his fidelity. He and he alone plucked it from me, blinded by the fatal draught that made him forget the past. Now I reclaim it —see!" The dead man unclosed the clenched hand, and she drew from the finger the Niebelungen Ring, and placed it on her own. "Speed you!" she cried. "Men, collect the wood, heap up the pyre, on which Siegfried shall burn. Ye women, cast on it your jewels. A right royal funeral shall be his. Fetch forth the horse, my noble Grane! That must die with the hero. Quick! heap up the fuel, in flame shall he sink!"

The men hasted to perform what she ordered. Close to the river, on the verge of the stream they piled up faggots; the women threw on it rich garments, precious jewels, strewed it with flowers.

And Brunnhilde, whilst they were thus employed, stood by the dead Siegfried and sang his dirge—

"As the sun's radiance Excelleth each star. As soars the eagle O'er all fowl afar, So was my hero Highest of all, So shone my hero Brightest of all. Troth it was broken, True to his friend, Side by side lay we, The steel lay between. False in appearance, Faithful in soul, False was in action, True in intent.

None hated falsehood Fuller than he: Falsest of men he proved, Faultless remained. O holy guardians Watching o'er oaths, Look on the havock Wrought by your will. Blind, ye avengers, Blameless was he. Blind and besotted Sharpened the steel. Blameless he suffered, Blameless remains. Lo! the doom falleth, Me it enfolds: Guilt scapeth scathless, Innocence falls. Hearken, ye hearers, List to my dirge, Heap up the faggots High for the king. Old order faileth, False has been found, New order riseth Out of the ground. Fire redly flaming, Cleanse thou the ring,

Burn out the error,
Burn in the true.
Hearken, ye ravens,
That round the earth wheel,
Bear ye these tidings
Unto Walhall!
Old order endeth
Crumbling in fire,
New order riseth
Where old doth expire!"

She signed to the men to lay the corpse of Siegfried on the pile of faggots.

Then looking on the ring drawn from Siegfried's hands, she said: "So the ring with which he me wed shall follow me to my end. If the Water-nixes would win it, let them take it out of the fire, from my ashes."

Seizing a brand, she thrust it into the pyre, and the flames roared up.

At the same moment the horse Grane was brought in.

"Grane! good horse!" said she,
"your master lies yonder; where he is,
there you must be; where he is, there
must I be also."

Then she leaped on Grane, and rode on him to the pyre, spurred him, and he plunged with her into the midst of the flames.

Then the whole heavens were enkindled—Walhalla was in flames as well. But the waters of the Rhine swelled, and rolled over the pyre, enveloped Hagen and sucked him down into their depths; but the Water-nixes, the Rhine daughters, from the pyre which was extinguished recovered the ring.1

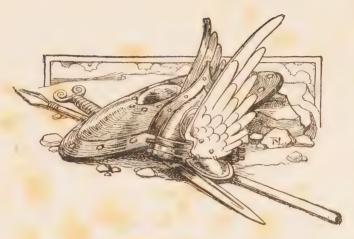
¹ Thus ends the story as told by Wagner. But in the original tale it is not so. According to the most ancient version of the Saga of Siegfried, after the hero's death, Brunnhilde bade raise a mighty pyre for him, and she bade that eight thralls and five female slaves

should be slain and placed round the faggots, and then she slew herself with Siegfried's sword, and laid herself beside him on the heap of wood, with the long bright blade between them, and thus were they consumed together.

But there is again another version of the tale—that she mounted her chariot, hung with precious tapestry, and was burnt in that. Moreover, among the most ancient lays of the Norse is one called "Brunnhilde's Hell-ride," in which is related how that in her chariot she rode from her death pyre to the region of the dead.



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